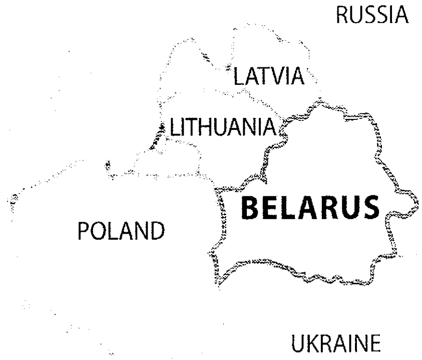
BELARUSIAN REVIEW





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Guest Editorial

New Year, New Media

Recently *Time* magazine picked the Virtual Community as its 2006 Person of the Year. Belarusians too are now a part of this community, and the country is on the verge of a virtual revolution. As a journalist returning from two years abroad, I found that the Belarus media scene hasn't changed much physically—the hardware is still the same, though there are fewer and fewer independent newspapers available. But in a virtual sense, the Belarusian information space has been transformed. This was already clear in March 2006, when, for the first time, the Internet and cell phones played a key role in post-election demonstrations. Internet forums, skype chats, blogs, online communities, and podcasts... A year or two ago, these phrases were alien to most Belarusians, even media experts. Today, it is the software that matters--a web version of a publication is almost required, online newspapers are more popular than printed media, and about 15,000 Belarusians have their own blogs on LiveJournal.

Lukashenka's regime was quite successful in getting rid of traditional independent media. One independent publication after another was shut down using various pretexts. The editors of those which remained tried to survive, always on the defensive, by conforming to ever more draconian regulations and self-censorship. But nothing seemed to make a difference. Just two years ago, the media situation seemed bleak. Even today, Reporters Without Borders ranks freedom of the media in Belarus as amongst the worst in the world, placing it 151 out of 168 countries. But I found that something has changed. Activists have now gone on the offensive. Instead of trying to play by the regime's rules, independent media in Belarus, with the help of the international community, are working to find new ways and means to disseminate objective information. And on this front, at least, the pro-democratic forces are beating the state and its propaganda machine at their own game—today we are more technologically advanced and much more creative. From the moment I landed, I could see the dramatic increase in free-floating, alternative media, embodied in traditional samizdat, community bulletins, online journalism, cross-border radio, blogs, etc. These new media are diverse, often do not require state registration, and can be produced at home and distributed online, which makes it harder for the authorities to control them.

In Belarus, a whole new media spectrum has arisen. For example, my magazine, *Studentskaya Dumka*, became the first multimedia publication to be produced on compact discs after the November 2005 print issue was seized for being printed with "poisonous ink" and the magazine was banned. The transformation from a print to a multimedia edition has allowed the magazine to become even more attractive to youth, which is drawn to compact disc and other computer-friendly technology. Like websites and video games, the CD format blends text and pictures with video, sound, music and flash animation. Since compact discs can be easily read, replicated or disseminated on any computer, an almost limitless number of copies can be burned and disseminated underground. Every day, thousands of students are visiting the very popular, Belarusian-language web-portal, studenty.by. Many Belarusians start their day by reading the online paper naviny.by or the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty website, thus seeking an alternative to what they hear on state TV and radio. Much that goes unreported by the professional media is appearing online via "the new digital democracy," personal blogs and Internet forums. And political and civic actions, such as flash mobs, are being virtually planned and coordinated. **What happens in the country and in the world is being discussed not only in kitchens, but also online, which has become the main platform for open public debate, especially among young people.** A leading independent paper, *Belgazeta*, claims that blogs have become a key force in the current information wars in Belarus. We are also witnessing a renaissance in Belarusian samizdat. Not since the late Soviet period have so many unregistered publications appeared. A prime example, and symbolic for the democratic movement, is a 21st century version of *Svaboda*. Produced by Miensk-based professional journalists in an electronic format, the layout is sent by email to the regions, where it is printed on risographs and distributed by local activists. Thousands of unregistered local bulletins are being published in small towns and villages across Belarus.

I am not trying to idealize the situation. A pervasive state propaganda continues to penetrate society. Our young people are being brainwashed via courses on state ideology and through state-run TV and radio. Repressions against independent media and journalists continue unabated, the security services monitor the Belarusian Internet, and the authorities are drafting a new law on media, which is primarily targeted at the new virtual and other alternative media. But no matter how hard he tries, Lukashenka does not have the power or resources to completely isolate our country from the rest of the world. Despite all the obstacles, pro-democratic forces are demonstrating a growing ability to supply people with independent information by combining traditional and innovative means. New technologies have opened a virtual door in the information blockade. They are also helping to link Belarusians living inside and outside the country, and build closer connections. If we keep our minds open to accepting and implementing new ideas, real changes will follow the virtual revolution.

Iryna V. is a historian by training and has studied and taught at Belarus State University. She did post-graduate work in public policy, the nonprofit sector and international relations at a leading university in the United States, where she also worked for several key democracy building NGOs and think tanks.

Correction: In the Fall issue, in the Editor's note at the end of Ethan Burger's article, **the author did not monitor 'the recent presidential election.'**

From the Publisher

The Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2006 H.R. 5948 passed both houses of Congress almost unanimously. Now it remains for the President to sign it.

The new bill has strengthened some of the provisions of the original bill. It calls for refusal by the United States to recognize any possible referendum or its results which may affect the sovereignty of Belarus. **It calls for objective information through TV broadcasts into Belarus, election transparency and the inclusion of independent domestic election observers.** It calls for freeing of all political prisoners and for tougher and wider sanctions specifically against the regime as it continues to violate all democratic principles.

Leading the overall effort in passing the BDRA was its sponsor Congressman **Chris Smith** of New Jersey. On the floor of the Congress he was ably assisted by the Ranking Member of the House International Relations Committee Congressman **Tom Lantos** and by **Elton Gallegly** of California, with strong support by the House Speaker **Dennis Hastert.** Both Co-Chairmen of the Central and Eastern Europe Caucus **Mc Cotter** and **Lipinski** were the key cosponsors. The fact that the bill was passed in almost record time is undoubtedly the result of the dedicated work by the staff of the Helsinki Commission. Staff Advisor **Orest Deychakiwsky** deserves a special mention in this regard.

As in the original bill, the amount of financial support for these measures was left on 'as much as is needed' basis. It remains for Belarusian-Americans to contact their elected representatives, in particular to contact those in Appropriations Committees, and urge them to provide adequate means to carry out the aims of the Act. The latest Putin-Lukashenka negotiations in Moscow, whose details are not yet fully known, severely threaten the economic sovereignty of Belarus, through the sell-off of Belarusian industrial infrastructure and through the imminent introduction of the Russian ruble, as the only currency.

It remains now for our readers and supporters to take steps to call on the governments in the free world to help the Belarusian people to maintain their independence, and to warn the current governments of Belarus and Russia that political or economic annexation will not be tolerated.

QUOTES of QUARTER

"Yes. We falsified the past Presidential elections. I already told the Westerners about it. 93.5% of the voters voted for President Lukashenka. But they say that this is not an European indicator. We made it 86%. That was indeed so."

ALEXANDER LUKASHENKA at a press conference for invited Ukrainian journalists on November 23 in Minsk

FEATURES

UN General Assembly Condemns Human Rights Abuses in Belarus

The UN General Assembly on December 20 adopted a resolution on human rights violations in Belarus by a vote of 72 to 32, with 69 states abstaining, Belapan reported.

The document condemns Minsk's failure to cooperate with the UN special rapporteur, bring electoral regulations into line with international standards, and hold a free and fair presidential election.

It also voices concern about the harassment of opposition activists, nongovernmental organizations, and journalists covering opposition demonstrations, and about the criminal prosecution of opposition leaders.

RFE/RL Newsline, December. 21, 2006

BDA Reauthorized for 2007-08

On December 8, 2006 the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2006 H.R.5948 by a vote of 397 to 2. The Senate followed by unanimously passing the bill.

The bill included the following statement of policy:

"It is the policy of the United States--

(1) to call upon the immediate release without preconditions of all political prisoners in Belarus

(2) to support the aspirations of the people of the Republic of Belarus for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law;

(3) to support the aspirations of the people of the Republic of Belarus to preserve the independence and sovereignty of their country;

4) to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in Belarus, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in that country;

(5) to refuse to accept the results of the fatally flawed March 19, 2006, presidential elections held in Belarus and support the call for new presidential elections;

(6) to refuse to recognize any possible referendum, or the results of any referendum, that would affect the sovereignty of Belarus; and

7) to work closely with other countries and international organizations, including the European Union, to promote the conditions necessary for the integration of Belarus into the European community of democracies."

The BDRA has strengthened some of the provisions of the original bill. The key among them was the US refusal to recognize any possible referendum on the 'Union State', a call for election transparency and for independent domestic election observers, and the addition of television broadcasting as part of the electronic media directed into Belarus. The sanctions against the regime have been strengthened and widened.

Full Floor Statement of U.S. Helsinki Commission Co-Chairman Representative Chris Smith,
December 7, 2006

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge passage of H.R. 5948, the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2006, to provide sustained support for the promotion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the Republic of Belarus, as well as encourage the consolidation and strengthening of Belarus' sovereignty and independence. Mr. Speaker, I especially thank you for your commitment to bring this legislation before this Congress. Your deep personal interest in the cause of freedom in Belarus, as demonstrated by your recent meetings in Vilnius with the leaders of the democratic opposition, has been particularly appreciated by those struggling for the rule of law and basic human freedoms. This legislation enjoys bipartisan support, and I want to recognize and thank the tremendous collaboration of Rep. Tom Lantos, an original cosponsor of this bill.

As one who has followed developments in Belarus over many years through my work on the Helsinki Commission, I remain deeply concerned that the Belarusian people continue to be subjected to the arbitrary and self-serving whims of a corrupt and anti-democratic regime headed by Aleksandr Lukashenka. Since the blatantly fraudulent March 19 presidential elections, which the OSCE condemned as having failed to meet international democratic standards, the pattern of repression and gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. While those who would dare oppose the regime are especially targeted, the reality is that all in Belarus outside Lukashenka's inner circle pay a price.

Recent news regarding Lukashenka's regime

Last week in Riga, President Bush pledged to help the people of Belarus in the face of the "cruel regime" led by President Lukashenka. "The existence of such oppression in our midst offends the conscience of Europe and the conscience of America," Bush said, adding that "we have a message for the people of Belarus: the vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace includes you, and we stand with you in your struggle for freedom." Mr. Speaker, this legislation would be a concrete expression of Congress' commitment to the Belarusian people and would show that we stand as one in supporting freedom for Belarus.

"The existence of such oppression in our midst (in Belarus) offends the conscience of Europe and the conscience of America."
President Bush in Riga

Just within the last few months, we have witnessed a series of patently political trials designed to further stifle peaceful, democratic opposition. In October, 60-year-old human rights activist Katerina Sadouskaya was sentenced to two years in a penal colony. Her "crime"? "insulting the honor and dignity of the Belarusian leader." Mr. Speaker, if this isn't reminiscent of the Soviet Union, I don't know what is. And just a few weeks ago, in a closed trial, Belarusian youth activist Zmitser Dashkevich received a one-and-a-half year sentence for "activities on behalf of an unregistered organization."

A report mandated by the Belarus Democracy Act and finally issued this past March reveals Lukashenka's links with rogue regimes such as Iran, Sudan and Syria, and his cronies' corrupt activities. According to an October 9, 2006, International Herald Tribune op-ed: "Alarmingly, over the last six years, Belarus has intensified its illegal arms shipment activities to the point of becoming the leading supplier of lethal military equipment to Islamic state sponsors of terrorism."

I guess we shouldn't be all that surprised that in July, Lukashenka warmly welcomed to Minsk Venezuela's Hugo Chavez. In keeping with their bent, both pledged cooperation and denounced the West. More recently, Belarusian Foreign Minister Martynov traveled to Iran where President Ahmadinejad pledged further cooperation in the energy and defense industries. Not long ago, a member of Belarus' bogus parliament asserted on state-controlled radio that Belarus has the right to develop its own nuclear weapons. Mr. Speaker and Colleagues, Belarus is truly an anomaly in Europe, swimming against the rising tide of greater freedom, democracy and economic prosperity.

The Legislation

Three years ago, I introduced the Belarus Democracy Act which passed the House and Senate with overwhelming bipartisan support and was signed into law by President Bush in October 2004. At that time, the situation in Belarus with respect to democracy and human rights was already abysmal. The need for a sustained U.S. commitment to foster democracy and respect for human rights and to sanction Aleksandr Lukashenka and his cronies, is clear from the intensified anti-democratic policies pursued by the current leadership in Minsk. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that countries throughout Europe have joined in a truly trans-Atlantic effort to bring the promise of freedom to the beleaguered people of Belarus. Prompt passage of the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2006 will help maintain this momentum aimed at upholding the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people. With the continuing decline on the ground in Belarus since the fraudulent March elections, this bill is needed now more than ever.

This reauthorization bill demonstrates the sustained U.S. support for Belarus' independence. We seek to encourage those struggling for democracy and respect for human rights in the face of the formidable pressures and personal risks from the anti-democratic regime. The bill authorizes such sums as may be necessary in assistance for each of fiscal years 2007 and 2008 for democracy-building activities such as support for non-governmental organizations, including youth groups, independent trade unions and entrepreneurs, human rights defenders, independent media, democratic political parties, and international exchanges.

The bill further authorizes monies for both radio and television broadcasting to the people of Belarus. While I am encouraged by the recent U.S. and EU initiatives with respect to radio broadcasting, much more needs to be done to penetrate Lukashenka's stifling information blockade. Mr. Speaker, I hope that the Administration will make this a priority.

In addition, H.R. 5948 calls for selective sanctions against the Lukashenka regime, and the denial of entry into the United States for senior officials of the regime - as well as those engaged in human rights and electoral abuses. In this context, I welcome the punitive sanctions imposed by both the Administration and the EU which are targeted against officials - including judges and prosecutors - involved in electoral fraud and other human rights abuses.

The bill expresses the sense of the Congress that strategic exports to the Government of Belarus should be prohibited, except for those intended for democracy building or humanitarian purposes, as well as U.S. Government financing and other foreign assistance. Of course, we would not want the exports to affect humanitarian goods and agricultural or medical products. The U.S. Executive Directors of the international financial institutions are encouraged to vote against financial assistance to the Government of Belarus except for loans and assistance that serve humanitarian needs. Furthermore, we would encourage the blocking of the assets (in the United States) of members of the Belarus Government as well as the senior leadership and their surrogates. To this end, I welcome the Treasury Department's April 10 advisory to U.S. financial institutions to guard against potential money laundering by Lukashenka and his cronies and strongly applaud President Bush's June 19 "Executive Order Blocking Property of Certain Persons Undermining Democratic Processes or Institutions in Belarus."

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it crystal clear that these sanctions are aimed not at the people of Belarus, but at a regime that displays contempt for the dignity and rights of its citizens even as the corrupt leadership moves to further enrich itself at the expense of all Belarusians.

Belarusian people deserve better than to live under a regime frighteningly reminiscent of the Soviet Union.

Ongoing Anti-Democratic Behavior

To chronicle the full litany of repression over the course of Lukashenka's 12-year misrule would go well beyond the bounds of time available here. Let me cite several more recent illustrations of anti-democratic behavior which testify to the true nature of the regime

Belarus' March 19 presidential elections can only be described as a farce, and were met with condemnation by the United States, the OSCE, the European Union and others. The Lukashenka regime's wholesale arrests of more than one thousand opposition activists and dozens of Belarusian and foreign journalists, before and after the elections, and violent suppression of peaceful post-election protests underscore the contempt of the Belarusian authorities toward their countrymen.

Illegitimate parliamentary elections in 2004 and the recently held presidential "elections" in Belarus brazenly flaunted democratic standards. As a result of these elections, Belarus has the distinction of lacking legitimate presidential and parliamentary leadership, which contributes to that country's self-imposed isolation. Albeit safely ensconced in power, Lukashenka has not let up on the democratic opposition. Almost daily repressions constitute a profound abuse of power by a regime that has blatantly manipulated the system to remain in power. In the last few months, the regime continues to show its true colors, punishing those who would dare to challenge the tinpot dictator. Former presidential candidate Aleksandr Kazulin was sentenced to a politically-motivated five-and-one-half-years' term of imprisonment for alleged "hooliganism" and disturbing the peace. His health is precarious as he is now well into his second month of a hunger strike.

In early August, authorities sentenced four activists of the non-partisan domestic election monitoring initiative "Partnerstva". In a patent attempt to discourage domestic observation of the fraudulent March 19 presidential elections, the four had been kept in custody since February 21. Two were released, having served their six month sentences. Two others -- Tsimafei Dranchuk and Mikalay Astreyka -- received stiffer sentences, although Astreyka has been released from a medium security colony and is now in "correctional labor". Other political prisoners, including Artur Finkevich, Mikalay Autukhovich, Andrey Klimau, Ivan Kruk, Yury Lyavonau, Mikalay Razumau, Pavel Sevyarynets, Mikalay Statkevich also continue to have their freedom denied, languishing in prison or in so-called correctional labor camps.

Administrative detentions of ten or fifteen days against democratic opposition activists are almost a daily occurence. Moreover, the Lukashenka regime continued to stifle religious expression. It refuses to register churches, temporarily detains pastors, threatens to expel foreign clergy, and refuses religious groups the use of premises to hold services. Despite the repressions, Protestant and Catholic congregations have increasingly become more active in their pursuit of religious freedom. I am also concerned about the recent explosion at a Holocaust memorial in western Belarus, the sixth act of vandalism against the monument in 14 years. Unfortunately, the local authorities have reportedly refused to open a criminal investigation. Lukashenka's minions have closed down independent think tanks, further tightened the noose around what remains of the independent media, suspended the activities of a political party, shut down the prominent literary journal Arche, and evicted the Union of Belarusian Writers from its headquarters. Of course, Lukashenka's pattern of contempt for human rights is nothing new - it has merely intensified with the passage of time.

Moreover, we have seen no progress on the investigation of the disappearances of political opponents - perhaps not surprisingly, as credible evidence points at the involvement of the Lukashenka regime in their murders.

Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2006 will help end to the pattern of violations of OSCE human rights and democracy commitments by the Lukashenka regime and loosen its unhealthy monopoly on political and economic power. I hope our efforts here today will facilitate independent Belarus' integration into democratic Europe in which the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law are respected. The beleaguered Belarusian people have suffered so much over the course of the last century and deserve better than to live under a regime frighteningly reminiscent of the Soviet Union. The struggle of the people of Belarus for dignity and freedom deserves our unyielding and consistent support.

This legislation is important and timely because Belarus, which now borders on NATO and the EU, continues to have the worst human rights and democracy record of any European state - bar none.

QUOTES of QUARTER

"We are saying to the Belarusian people: our vision of a united, free and peaceful Europe includes Belarus. We stand together with you in your fight for freedom."

President **GEORGE BUSH** at the NATO conference in Riga on November 28

Proposals and Demands of the European Union

Today the leadership of the EU has announced a document stating the advantages the EU could offer to Belarus in case Belarus would embark on the path of democratization and respect of human rights and rule of law. The document is to be passed to Belarusian government today both in Minsk and in Brussels. The full text of the document follows.

What the European Union could bring to Belarus:

The European Union has a special relationship with its closest neighbours around its eastern and southern borders. This is called the European Neighbourhood Policy. Through this policy, the EU works to support the political, economic and social reform processes of its neighbours, and to draw them closer to the EU, notably through gradual economic integration. This will allow for the further extension of a zone of prosperity, stability and security, thus sharing with the people of Belarus the benefits the EU (which includes three of Belarus' neighbours -Latvia, Lithuania and Poland) has built over the last 50 years. The EU is already working with Belarus' neighbours and partners and would of course like to build such a relationship with Belarus. This would contribute to reinforcing Belarusian links with countries that are part of the European Neighbourhood Policy already, such as Ukraine and Moldova. At the same time, this would fully respect traditional Belarusian relationships with our other common neighbour, Russia, which is also a strategic partner for the EU.

What the EU offers to Belarus

When Belarus becomes a full participant in our neighbourhood policy[1], and thus a full partner of the EU, the EU would be able to help to improve quality of life of the Belarusian people. To this end, the EU and Belarus would work together to achieve the following improvements that would directly benefit the people of Belarus: easier travel by Belarusian citizens to EU countries; increased cross-border cooperation, allowing greater cooperation on economic development, environmental protection and border management; boosting the Belarusian economy, supporting the development of small and medium enterprises and preparing Belarusian enterprises for further opportunities in the European market.

This would create more jobs and provide better perspectives also for the younger generations; this could be achieved through economic reforms that would make Belarus more attractive for foreign investors; improve the provision of healthcare and education and of support for the vulnerable in society; making the Belarusian public administration and local government more efficient in order to provide the people of Belarus with better services; reform of the legal and judicial system to ensure equal rights to all.

This requires independent judges who work in a fair and independent manner to protect the rights of all citizens and the development of civil society; greater economic opportunities for Belarus and improved living conditions for its citizens through the development and modernisation of transport and energy networks.

This would improve Belarus' road and rail links to its neighbours as part of a European-wide network, thus facilitating travel and the transport of goods; improve the quality of the environment: water quality, waste treatment, continued support to deal with the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster; participation in Europe-wide cooperation on environment, health, food safety standards, working conditions, aviation safety, judicial cooperation etc. through participation in European programmes and agencies.

We would also be able to develop more and better contacts between the EU and Belarus:

We would simplify contacts across the border and make border-crossing easier for local people through cooperation with Belarus' neighbours; Belarusian cities and communities could work together with cities and communities in the EU, exchanging information and experiences on how to better serve the population;

We would offer Belarusian students more scholarships to study in EU universities.

We would encourage regular and long-term exchanges and lasting relationships between universities in Belarus and in the EU at all levels, including both administrative and academic;

We could have a close dialogue and cooperation with Belarus' democratically-elected leaders and civil servants and experts on a wide range of issues, domestic or international, of importance to us all. Belarusian views would be heard more widely on the international stage;

We could more actively involve representatives of Belarus – at national, regional or local level – as well as Belarusian officials, academics, scientists etc., in working together to tackle issues of common interest, sharing and exchanging our expertise and know-how on e.g. economy and trade, modern governance, the rule of law, information, education, tourism, culture, research, energy, health, social issues, environment, transport and communication etc.

We would have deeper economic and trade relations and more business opportunities: Greater access for Belarusian products, provided they meet our standards, to the EU market of 480 million consumers, which would help to increase Belarus' trade and subsequently enhance the country's further economic development;

Looking in particular at the Belarusian textile sector, better possibilities for textile products from Belarus to enter the European market;

When Belarus joins the World Trade Organisation, this should increase market opportunities for Belarusian products across the world, including in the EU.

In order to support Belarus' economic and social development programmes, we would significantly increase European financial assistance, and we would offer our valuable experience in reforms. Belarus has, up to now, received far less assistance than its neighbours.

However, this situation would change and Belarus would receive assistance comparable to that of its neighbours, if the Belarusian government takes significant steps towards democratisation.

What can the Belarusian government do? Unfortunately, at this stage, the policies pursued by President Lukashenko's authoritarian regime prevent us from offering Belarus full participation in our neighbourhood policy. The EU cannot offer to deepen its relations with a regime which denies its citizens their fundamental democratic rights. The people of Belarus are the first victims of the isolation imposed by its authorities and will be the first to reap the benefits on offer to a democratic Belarus.

The EU wishes to share with its neighbours the prosperity, stability and security which its own citizens enjoy. This requires political, economic and administrative reforms from our partner countries. To support our neighbours in these efforts, the EU offers political, economic and trade opportunities as well as financial assistance to countries which respect human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. These are values to which Belarus has already committed itself, of its own free will, as a member of the United Nations, the OSCE and other organisations, but which the current Belarusian government in practice does not respect.

What the EU asks of Belarusian authorities:

To build the deeper relationship which we wish to have between the EU and the Belarusian people, to end the self-imposed isolation which the Belarusian government has brought upon its country's citizens, we ask that the Belarusian authorities should, first and foremost:

respect the right of the people of Belarus to elect their leaders democratically – their right to hear all views and see all election candidates;

the right of opposition candidates and supporters to campaign without harassment, prosecution or imprisonment; independent observation of the elections, including by Belarusian non-governmental organisations;

their freedom to express their will and have their vote fairly counted;

respect the right of the people of Belarus to independent information, and to express themselves freely e.g. by allowing journalists to work without harassment or prosecution, not shutting down newspapers or preventing their distribution;

respect the rights of non-governmental organisations as a vital part of a healthy democracy – by no longer hindering their legal existence, harassing and prosecuting members of NGOs, and allowing them to receive international assistance;

release all political prisoners – members of democratic opposition parties, members of NGOs and ordinary citizens arrested at peaceful demonstrations or meetings;

properly and independently investigate or review the cases of disappeared persons[2];

ensure the right of the people of Belarus to an independent and impartial judicial system – with judges who are not subject to political pressure, and without arbitrary and unfounded criminal prosecution or politically-motivated judgements such as locking-up citizens who peacefully express their views; end arbitrary arrest and detention, and ill-treatment;

respect the rights and freedoms of those Belarusian citizens who belong to national minorities;

respect the rights of the people of Belarus as workers – their right to join a trade union and the right of trade unions to work to defend the people's rights;

respect the rights of the people of Belarus as entrepreneurs to operate without excessive intervention by the authorities; join the other nations of Europe in abolishing the death penalty;

make use of the support which the OSCE, the EU and other organisations offer to Belarus to help it respect the rights of its people.

The EU stands ready to renew its relationship with Belarus and its people, as soon as the Belarusian government demonstrates respect for democratic values and for the basic rights of the Belarusian people.

Meanwhile, the EU will continue to provide funding for Belarus to assist regions affected by the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe, or to support the fight against human trafficking, in particular the trafficking of women, across European borders.

At the same time, the EU will continue to work to give the people of Belarus access to independent information in order to allow them to hear all sides of the arguments before drawing their own conclusions.

The EU will continue to support the written press and the broadcasting of independent TV and radio programmes to Belarus.

The EU will also welcome and provide financial support for Belarusian students studying in European universities. [1]

In order to fully benefit from the European Neighbourhood Policy, a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between Belarus and the EU would need to be ratified. Such an Agreement was in fact signed in 1996 but its ratification was frozen due to the lack of respect for democracy and human rights in Belarus.

[2] Yuri Zakharenko (former Minister of the Interior, disappeared on 7 May 1999), Victor Gonchar (former Vice-President of the Parliament of Belarus, disappeared on 16 September 1999), Anatoly Krasovski (businessman disappeared with Mr Gonchar) and Dmitri Zavadski (cameraman for the Russian TV channel ORT, disappeared on 7 July 2000).

Source: Charter'97 Press Center, November 21, 2006

QUOTES of QUARTER

"Today we sent a message to the Belarusian people. It is very important to note this: we are explaining to Belarusians what is being presented to them, once the government undertakes the (appropriate) changes."

BENITA FERRERO-WALDNER, EU Foreign Affairs Commissioner while presenting on November 18 the new EU strategy toward Belarus

Belarus-Poland Borderland And the European Union

Study of the problems in context of the European Union enlargement

September 4-10, 2005 with minor updates in 2006

The study consists of two parts, one in this issue dealing with the Bialystok region in Poland, the other, in the next issue, with the Hrodna region in Belarus.

Participants: Malkhaz Chemia (Georgia, Institute for Minorities and Refugees Problems), Andrei Kazakevich (Belarus, political scientist, editor-in-chief of Political Sphere magazine), Palina Stsepanenka (coordinator of the West sub-network of the Working Group, journalist, Belarus). The study was supported technically by the Hrodna branch of Lew Sapeha Foundation (Hrodna, Belarus), and the Educational Center "Poland-Belarus" (Bialystok, Poland).

Problems:

1. Intergovernmental conflict between Poland and Belarus connected with change of leadership of the Union of Poles of Belarus. Aggravation of relations between Polish minority organizations and Belarusian authorities.
2. Trial of publishers of the Belarusian weekly *Niva* in Poland.
3. Ethnical diversity of the population divided by the state border. Difficult history of mutual relations, violation of the rights of minorities by both sides in the past and prospects of good-neighborly relations in the future.
4. Enlargement of the European Union + new line of demarcation. To what extent will it divide the local population, will assimilation increase, etc. How will the new borders impact the ethnical and political situation?

Objectives:

1. to collect information about history of inter-ethnic relations and their present situation,
2. to collect general information about ethnical and political situation:

- what is the attitude of the minorities to the political situation and the state authorities
- Is there pressure by the authorities on Polish minority organizations in Belarus? Define the type of possible pressure
- Is there pressure by the authorities on Belarusian minority organizations in Poland? Define the type of possible pressure
- Are there registered facts of violation of the rights of national minorities by the authorities?
- Is there a practice of xenophobia and distrust in everyday life?
- To define the level of inter-denominational (Catholic - Orthodox) relations in Poland.

3. The "new border" and development of national communities: consequences and prospects. Attitude of the population to the EU enlargement and the new border — hopes and fears.
4. Prospects of preserving the national culture and identity on both sides of the border.

Brief Historical Outline

In the Early Middle Ages the territory of the future Belarus-Poland borderland was dominated by Orthodox Eastern Slavs. In the 14th century the region becomes part of the Great Duchy of Lithuania (**Editor's note**: a predominantly Slavic state whose official language was Old Belarusian). The western part of the region forms historical Podlachia, and becomes subject to vigorous Polish colonization. During the following centuries a part of the region, including the cities of Bielsk,and Biely Stok becomes a part of the Kingdom of Poland.[1]

In the 16-18th cc. a greater part of the political elite and gentry adopts Catholicism and identifies itself with the Polish culture. After the Union of Orthodox and Catholic Churches in 1596, an absolute majority of the Orthodox become members of the Uniate Church.

As a result of the Third Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795, the bigger part of the region is incorporated into the Russian Empire. [2] In 1839 the Russian government abolishes the Church Union; the majority of the Uniates gradually revert to Orthodoxy, the rest become Roman Catholics. With the rise of the Polish national movement, Catholicism becomes associated with the Polish culture, while Orthodoxy becomes associated with the Russian culture. Interestingly, however, the leaders of the Belarusian national movement of the 19th century could be found in both denominations. (**Editor's note:** Today, there are very few Catholics in the region who still identify themselves as Belarusians.)

In 1921 the Soviet government and Poland conclude the Riga Peace Treaty. According to this treaty, all of western Belarus becomes part of the Polish state. In the period of 1921-1939 the predominantly non-Polish local population was subject to polonization, on one hand, and to political and cultural discrimination, on the other.

After the German-Soviet pact about partition of the Polish state, and during the first months of World War II, both Bialystok and Hrodna regions became part of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Under German occupation of 1941-1944 the region became part of the East Prussia, forming the Bialystok district.

In 1945 the Soviet-Polish treaty gives the whole Bialystok region to Poland and sets a new border which exists now.

Bialystok region (Bialystok voivodship, Poland)

There are about 150-200,000 Orthodox Christians in the region, of which 50,000 have identified themselves as Belarusians, according to the 2002 census. The rest of the Orthodox identified themselves as Poles (**Editor's note**: two or three generations ago, such a population segment as

[1] In the 14th -16th cc. the Polish Kingdom and the Great Duchy of Lithuania conclude a number of treaties, which later lead to creation of a confederative state — the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Rzeczpospolita, or Res Publica).

[2] In the early 19th century the whole region became part of the Russian Empire.

Orthodox Poles was practically non-existent. It came about as the result of many decades of polonization. Under Polish rule, many Belarusians were assimilated, with a substantial number nevertheless retaining their Orthodox faith.) This phenomenon is most visible in the bigger cities: for instance, in Bialystok only 18-20% of the Orthodox Christians consider themselves Belarusian.Throughout the whole region, , about 1/3 of the Orthodox Christians identified themselves as Belarusians.

Public opinion polls and electoral behavior give grounds to the claim that about 50-100,000 Orthodox Christians have a transitional or mixed (Belarusian--Polish) identity. At present Orthodox Christians reside mainly in the eastern part of the region, close to the Belarusian border. Bielsk and Hajnowka towns are the main centers of Belarusian culture. The town of Hajnowka with about 22,500 residents, and the adjacent districts are the area of compact residence of the Belarusian and Orthodox minority. Hajnowka is one of the centers of Belarusian culture in Poland; Belarusian organizations are represented in the local government bodies, there is a Belarusian high school and a museum of Belarusian culture has been established. The Orthodox make up 60% of the town+s population, with 26% identifuing themselves as Belarusians. They reside compactly in the eastern part of the Hajnowka district, where in a number of communities they make up an absolute majority. In Czyzy and Dubiczy-Cerkowne over 80% of the residents are Belarusians. The city of Bialystok is the organizational center of the Belarusian movement; majority of Belarusian organizations have their centers there.

The Bialystok region is distinguished overall by stable religious and national traditions and certain conservatism. At the same time, the region is one of the poorest in the country.

Belarusian minority

Despite its relatively small numbers (50 thousand with national and additional 50-100 thousand with weakened and mixed identity), the Belarusian minority is quite developed in both the cultural and political spheres. While many Belarusians supported the regime, others formed an underground anti-communist opposition, the only national minority in in 1980's Poland to do so. At present, Belarusians actively participate in elections and other political campaigns; there is a Belarusian Election Committee. There are literary, historical, folklore societies; there are irregular magazines and monographs published in the Belarusian language. The community also publishes the weekly *Niva* in Belarusian, airs radio and television programs, etc. [3] Bialystok and Warsaw Universities have Belarusian chairs. The Belarusian minority in the Bialystok region has a special significance for the overall Belarusian culture; it is actively included in the current cultural and social processes in Belarus

[3] Polish communist authorities permited the creation of the Belarusian Civic and Cultural Society and the *Niva* newspaper in the 1950's.

Linguistic situation

Belarusians mainly use the local dialects of the Belarusian language in their everyday communication. As a rule, Belarusian language is used for communication inside the national community. The language for official communication and communication with visitors is Polish. Belarusian language is used by Belarusian organizations in their electoral campaigns. Polish language dominates in the official sphere.

Religious institutions of the region rarely use the Belarusian language. The Catholic Church uses only Polish; Orthodox Church uses Church Slavonic or Russian, and seldom, the Belarusian language. At present, the hierarchs of the Polish Orthodox Church are promoting gradual introduction of Polish as the primary language. The Polish Orthodox Church offers practically no support to the Belarusian movement.

Ethno-cultural conceptions and stereotypes

As a rule, Poles have a stereotype of Belarusians as of a badly-organized, undefined community without a cultural tradition. In other words, in general, Belarusians are considered to be "lesser" people, although Belarusians otherwise do not stand out in any crowd. Such negative characterizations of the Orthodox and Belarusian minority are reinforced by well established myths regarding people+s migration and the their roots. They include one about the settlement of the Orthodox population in the region organized by the authorities of the Russian Empire, and another, about russification of ethnic Poles at that time. Besides that, Orthodox Christians and Belarusians were identified with the "Communists", "Soviets", "Russians", etc. Some of these stereotypes have prevailed to this day.[4] The word "katsaps", common for all the Orthodox and Eastern Slavs, is quite often used as a negative nickname for Belarusians.

At the same time, the earlier state planned assimilation, state sponsored influx of Polish colonists, discrimination and repression against Belarusian organizations and national activists still linger in the minds of local Belarusians. In the period after the World War II there were several groups active in the region whose goal was to violently oust Belarusians from the area.. Later, in the eighties, threats against Orthodox Christians were not uncommon, as were attempts to burn Orthodox churches. Remembrances of the past have left an impact on the present perception of nationality and religious relations.

Education System

Poland's legislation entitles national minorities to receive education in their mother tongue. The system of national education for Belarusians in Poland consists of a network of about 40 schools that teach the following courses in Belarusian: Belarusian language, Basics of the Belarusian Culture, Belarusian Literature and History. All other subjects are taught in Polish.

[4] It should be pointed out that because of the discrimination and quite poor economic situation, the region had a very strong left-wing movement in the period between the wars. As a result, representatives of the Belarusian and Orthodox minoeity took quite an active part in consolidation of power of the Polish People's Republic after the World War II.

Belarusian Minority and Political Power

Belarusians and Orthodox Christians of the Bialystok region tend to vote of left-wing political parties. It is mainly in response the high degree of clericalism prevalent in the right-wing part of the political spectrum of the region. [5] Belarusians are represented in the local self-governments at the level of *gmina*, the smallest administrative unit; there are Belarusian representatives in municipal councils and executive bodies.

Belarusian political movement is represented by the Belarusian Election Committee, which also has some representatives in governmental structures.

In general, there is a certain tension between the religious and national groups in the region. The level of tension does not exclude conflicts and discrimination on the everyday and official levels. Quite a few of the political organizations of the region consider Belarusian and Orthodox elements alien and do not integrate them in the local cultural and social context. The level of anti-Orthodox sentiments in the region is significantly higher than in Poland in general. However, at present, the confrontation does not take open forms.

Real political confrontation is observed only in the areas were the size of Belarusian (Orthodox) and Polish populations is approximately equal. Primarily, it applies to manpower policy in the local governmental structures and in the distribution of financial resources. It is also reflected in the activity of radical political groups.

[5] In the eighties the Orthodox Christians of the Bialystok region did not really participate in the Solidarity movement. Here Solidarity had a clearly defined Catholic nature. There were widespread rumors about possible repression against all non-Catholics if Solidarity were to come to power. In their turn, region's Catholics were quite active. Father Jerzy Popieluszko, the spiritual leader of Solidarity and defender of human rights, comes from this region.

(**Editor's note:** In the recent years two major issues, namely, the conflict over the Union of Poles in Belarus and the Belarusian-language weekly's *Niva* trial in Poland, contributed to the tensions in the region. They will be presented as condensed versions of the original articles which were a part of the study, in the next issue of *Belarusian Review*, ahead of the Hrodna region section)

QUOTES of QUARTER

"On our doorstep we have Belarus, a black hole on the face of European democracy, a scar on the face of Europe, a Europe that should be unblemished."

MATTI VANHANNEN,the Prime Minister of Finland in summing up the results of his 6-month EU presidency (as reported by Reuters)

BELARUS' FORUM

Belarus without Lukashenka – A Realistic Alternative

By Hans-Georg Wieck

The most recent issue of the BELARUSIAN REVIEW (Fall 2006, Volume 18, Nr.3) prompted me to write down a number of comments and observations regarding the state of affairs in Lukashenko's autocratic state of Belarus. I do so with the background of my work in Belarus as the Head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group from December 1997 until the end of 2001, and in my current capacity as the Chairman of the Berlin based association *Menschenrechte in Weißrussland eV (Human Rights in Belarus).* This association has prepared in German language a documentation on the disappeared politicians in Belarus and issued in April 2006 - in German, English and Russian languages - a concept for a new European policy on Belarus (www.human-rights-belarus.org)

Ethan Burger recalled in his article *"Destroying the Big Lie"* his experience in Belarus during and after the presidential election in 2001: *"During my time in Minsk (which has almost 20 % of the Belarusian population) I did not meet a single person, who did not work for the government , who said they had voted for Lukashenko. And yet, to no one's surprise, he was declared the winner in the city by a landslide"*. He rightfully recalled a number of political figures at the time displaying some charismatic qualities such as Jury Zakharanka and Victor Hanchar, who were made disappear by willing executives of the Lukashenko regime in the year 1999. He should have mentioned as well the genuine political challenger to Lukashenka at the time, namely Henadz Karpenka one of the leading figures of the democratic opposition to Lukashenka. He died – under mysterious circumstances - a sudden an unexpected death on April 6, 1999.

Ethan Burger –like to so many other observers at the time and in our days – deplores that the opposition is missing a charismatic leader in these days that could lead the masses in opposition to Lukaschenka and win elections on such a basis. This may be a valid point in principle, but is not working under the conditions of a dictatorship - unfortunately.

Under the conditions of the current dictatorship in Belarus –like in all other dictatorships of the past – a personality that appears to emerge as a charismatic opposition leader on the political stage will not survive the day.

However, the system is vulnerable. Ethan Burger describes rightfully Alexander Lukaschenka, who had rigged massively the elections on September 9, 2001, as one of the biggest beneficiaries of 9/11.

The Lukashenka regime depends on his control of the information grid, of the economic and industrial assets, the currency and the legal system. Therefore a strategy to challenge him and his autocratic rule requires a number of essential steps:

• The state information monopole has to be broken – by way of electronic media that can actually reach every corner

of the country and through which not only information about the real state of affairs in Belarus, but also about the image of Belarus abroad and the developments on the international stage can be broadcast into each home. At present, TV- and Radio-programs in Belarusian and Russian languages are broadcast from abroad into the country can reach only a fraction of the country, in particular they cannot reach Minsk.

• The winning strategy of opposition under the conditions of an autocratic or dictatorial rule builds on the formation of a broad political and civil society based social coalition comprising all sectors of society – trade unions, women organisations, youth organisations, if possible entrepreneurs and the academic as well as the cultural dimension of the country. In each sector of civil society there is a nucleus of opposition to the dictatorship. It has to be activated and brought to platform of the coalition of forces that selects the challenger in presidential elections– who may not be a charismatic personality. He should be entrusted with the task of a coordinator of the forces in the country embedded in every sector of the country that seek a substantial change of direction for the country. This is a nation wide rooted coalition of democratic and other forces against the policy of the acting President who led the country into dictatorship, isolation and total dependence on Moscow. In 2001 such a coalition emerged eventually – however too late. In 2006 the opposition was restricted to democratic forces and in the end it was split. A dictatorship can apply many tactics in order to split the opponents.

• It is the obvious that such a strategy can succeed only after a systematic build-up phase of mutual confidence and organizational efficiency countrywide. A great deal of activities has to be performed abroad (see Hans-Georg Wieck, *Demoktratieförderung in der Sackgasse – Europa versagt in Belarus, OSTEUROPA, September 2006).Under the headline "Policy Failure or Failure of Inaction" (www.hans-georg-wieck.com).*

A contribution to your "BELARUS' FORUM , signed *VW* notes the absence of a European policy for Belarus – beyond the usual ritual of addition visa sanctions against functionaries of the system. He concluded his contribution – rightfully so - with the words *"Get a sound policy towards Belarus and let's start working together. At last."*

David Marples raises in his contribution the very relevant question *"How secure Is Lukashenka?"* He comes to the conclusion: "*In reality, there are no discernible external threats to the Lukashenka regime and for the moment the internal ones have subsided*". I suggest differing from this assessment. In principle David Marples may be right –if judged on the basis of what is visible on the surface of Russian-Belarusian relations and on the surface of the internal security situation of Belarus with a standard of living based on preferential prices for Russian gas and oil and on the impressive image of a shining capital city centre of Minsk. But beyond these showpieces of a dictatorship there is a great deal of poverty, deficient supply with health and medical supply, mismanagement of housing and general supplies – not to speak of the living conditions on the countryside. Thanks to courageous young politicians — Olga Karach from Vitebsk — we know better.

Lukashenka himself is fearful of changes in Russian attitudes – for instance in connection with the presidential elections in the Russian Federation in 2008. Moscow plays with the idea of substantial price-hikes for gas and oil deliveries to Minsk thus undermining his resistance against a Russia led Union State of Russia and Belarus.

He is fearful of the existing silent resistance among the nomenclature of his own government whom he does not trust. He shares the nightmares of all the dictators in history and reaches out with his revenge on anyone from his apparatus who dared joining the opposition – the presidential candidate Alexander Kazulin being the most recent one in a long row of victims.

Actually, Lukashenka finds himself in a dead end road. He depends on privileged economic relations with Russia and on the effectiveness of his policy of intimidation and suppression at home.

Therefore the opposition coalition has to be ready to take over at any given time. The population has to be given a real picture of the situation of the country on a continued basis. The COALITION must be in a position to call for presidential and parliamentary elections at any given time and win them, and to conduct effectively a country wide election campaign on short notice.

EU: Get a sound policy towards Belarus and let's start working together.

In view of this precarious situation we – the *Association Human Rights in Belarus* – urged the European Union in April 2006 to adopt a pro-active policy on Belarus consisting of the following main measures:

• Nomination of a EU commissioner for Belarus and the formation of an advisory committee comprising high profile European politicians and experts

• Establishment of a democracy fund for Belarus with special implementation regulations which can meet the requirements of the actual situation in Belarus

• Provision of electronic media platforms abroad capable of reaching all parts of Belarus

• Advisory and discussion platforms in the West with participants of high standing from Europe for consultations with the political and social opposition in Belarus

• Professional training and education facilities in Europe for active components of civil society in Belarus.

The unfolding of history cannot be predicted. Belarus finds itself on a dead end road and needs major re-orientation – after Lukashenka. Nobody knows when this opportunity is going to offer itself. The country has to be ready for it at any given time — and so has the opposition.

Hans-Georg Wieck, former OSCE ambassador to Belarus.
Chairman, Association for Human Rights in Belarus

Source: www.human-rights-belarus.org
Berlin, October 14, 2006

Comments on Lukashenka's Statements Concerning Belarusian Language

Vintsuk Viachorka, the leader of the Belarusian Popular Front Party gave the following commentary on statements about the Belarusian language that were made by Aliaksandr Lukashenka during his press-conference with Russian journalists:

"Usually I try not to comment those multi-hour plays. However, this time I was hooked by his demagogy about our language: 'It is untrue that we don't support the Belarusian language. We support it where it is necessary.' I'll draw just one fact demonstrating this 'support' (taken from the dossier of the Belarusian School Society):

In the curriculum year 1993/1994 (the last before Luashenka's election) 76% of the children in the first or preparatory grades were educated in Belarusian. In the capital it was 58,6%. Two years later it was 37,9% and 19,5% respectively. This year only 21,4% first-grade pupils are being taught in Belarusian – the percentage has dropped below the survival barrier in the next generation that had been determined by UNESCO. It is unpleasant to say, but in Minsk it is only 2,4%.

I also consider Lukashenka's statement that 'many mathematical terms are impossible to express in Belarusian' a direct insult of our language and those who speak it."

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, October 10, 2006

Let Your Lights Shine So Before Men ...

Heading to Saturday's demonstration organized by the Protestants of the New Life Church, I had mixed feelings. Bangalore Square , the location where the Miensk City Administration usually allows opposition protests, is located far from downtown and is hidden in a huge park. Sadly, this space has never been graced by the hundreds of thousands of people which it could easily embrace. And I was afraid to see the Square full of only shadows again. On the other hand, I was excited to show my solidarity with these believers who, while not part of the "traditional opposition," have shown to be very organized, dedicated and committed in fighting for the right to have their own church. I didn't expect that this demonstration would spark mass protests, like in March, but I did hope that all of our democratic forces would use it as an opportunity to shine a light on the common struggle for the universal rights of freedom of association and worship.

The regime allowed 700 people to gather for two hours. Perhaps this is why the event was not widely publicized. 700 were already there, including a few agents easily identified by their typical black leather jackets and hats, but, surprisingly, no police, when I reached the square at dusk, just after 6pm. The organizers had asked participants not to bring national flags or political materials, and appealed to coalition leaders not to make any statements, so that the demonstration would not be perceived as an "opposition gathering." The crowd control, organized by the Protestants themselves, even asked people to take off their "For Freedom" pins, which I found strange, since many Protestants had participated in the March events and "For Freedom" campaign. Maybe because of this, or due to the setting sun, I didn't see many politicians in the crowd. This was sad, because mutual reproaches (the Protestants claim that the opposition doesn't support them enough and the political leaders complain that the Protestants choose to distance themselves from the opposition) again dimmed the impact on the democratic movement as a whole. If Milinkevich was not there, it would have been strange, because he has pushed hard for support for the Protestants since 2004.

But the atmosphere at the demonstration itself was radiant. The sound was perfect — everybody could actually hear the speeches. The skilful orators, mostly pastors of different Protestant churches, spoke about freedom, justice, and an independent Belarus, and were able to light up the crowd, which responded enthusiastically with words of approval and "Amen!" rather than the traditional "Long Live Belarus!" Mikhas Skobla, poet and Vice Chairman of the Belarusian Union of Writers, reminded the crowd about another hunger strike in Miensk, 16 years ago. Then, it was the Catholics who were demanding the return of the well-known "Red Church," which the Soviets had turned into a cinema house. And the Catholics won their struggle.

The New Life Church also is hopeful. Last week, its pastor had a meeting with an assistant of Lukashenka, who claimed that the head of the state was concerned about the case and suggested that the Church file another court appeal. While many remain skeptical (yesterday two more people joined an on-going hunger strike), others are afraid that Lukashenka will use this case for his own PR purposes, to "divide and conquer" different Protestant groups, while the persecution of non-Orthodox confessions would continue. Perhaps in response, the demonstrators approved a resolution demanding an end to laws restricting all religious freedom.

One pastor declared that the Belarusian nation was sick with the sin of indifference and passivity+bitter words, but true. Although the crowd visibly grew towards the demonstration's end, most of the capital's citizens didn't care or didn't know about the protest and hunger strike. Life goes on, and some local boys played games in the crowd as others held hands and prayed. But as the darkness was brightened by cell phones held high during the closing hymn, I had a feeling that every protest like this, every act of civic resistance, no matter how small, brings us closer to victory. And I prayed for more solidarity and the light of wisdom amongst all of those struggling for a free Belarus.

Source: TOL Blogs, Belarus, Oct. 24, 2006

New Life Church Scores A Small Victory

On 4 November, the Supreme Economic Court of Belarus revoked all previous court decisions against the Protestant Church New Life in Minsk that de-registered the congregation and would force it to sell its building (formerly a car farm renovated by the the believers) for peanuts, essentially ending the congregation's existence. A hunger strike that continued for more than 3 weeks is perhaps the first act of collective resistance to the government of Belarus that forced it to back off... It does not mean the case is closed. The Supreme Economic court will re-examine all the claims on the basis of which previous decisions of the courts and authorities were made. The New Life appealed the expulsion 11 times before and lost all cases. This triggered the hunger strike, in which about 200 persons took part...

On the pictures: the cattle farm before church bought it; that is what they turned it into; service on the square in Minsk; They pray under the slogan "Dear Lord, we love Belarus!")

I am really tempted to say: one small step for a church, one giant step for the country. Maybe not. The government backed off in extraordinary circumstances - when it figured out that its repressive machine is useless - after all, these people were prepared to die for their faith... But the importance is, that the New Life members showed that the wall CAN be broken.

Church has its own English language website. Look for the chronicle of protest.



Evangelical Christians on Hunger Strike

The church was careful in avoiding association of its protest with the opposition. There were even reports about priests asking sympathisers to take off 'unregistered symbols' when entering the building... But priests and parishioners discovered, willingly or unwillingly, that even if they stay out of politics, politics will find its way to their faith and temple. Speaks priest of another Protestant church Dmitry Zelensky who went on hunger strike out of solidarity:

Today, a negative attitude to all Evangelical Christians of our country (not solely to New Life church) is being imposed on our society through mass media. It is done for a purpose to make people think of us not as of Christian believers, but as of members of bad sects, as of destructive elements of our society. I consider, the negative article in the "Belarusian Military Paper", which is read by almost all military people in our country, was published for a purpose.

This newspaper reaches every military unit. Much "good" is done in Belarus by the hands of military men. I perceive a very dangerous tendency in this. The public opinion is being raised against Evangelical Christians now. And it may lead to bad consequences. Therefore we should in no way think of putting an end to our action. We have to be alert and intensify prayer.

What is the Protestants' guilt? Ah, Westernizing influences and famous Protestant ethics. But this is carefully wrapped in Belarus as opposition to so-called 'totalitarian sects', which proselytize away from Russia Orthodoxy and turn members into satanism and suicidal activities. That is what I was taught at school about the Protestant sects, and the line is probably continuing today. And, by the way, authorities engaged in their usual set of provocations: slander, harassment, and so on. Some unknowns desecrated the exterior of the church by writing something like 'no to the totalitarian sects!' The meaning of 'totalitarian' - did they even understand it? Perhaps, not, if yes, they would have painted this slogan on the presidential residence.

P.S. Funny thing. On the church's web, I have found "A prophecy of David Wilkerson", an American pastor who visited the church in September 2003. Here is what he had to say to parishioners about their - and their country's - future...

I see in spirit how the nation was bound in chains. The Satan tries to tie the Church of Jesus Christ, and the forces of darkness try to tie adoration and exhaltation. All the society is in fear and chains. I came to your city and see the stature of Lenin on the square – the remnants of the darkness of the past.

... Holy spirit ordered me to announce this to you. The Lord says, Enough!

And I am not afraid of telling this. The Lord declares the war, and this will not be your war. You will hear soon, how, without a single shot, you will not know how everything happened, but there will be no more Lenin here. Because the Lord is back!

You shall not fight with people, you shall not say anything bad against your nation. You have to be patriots. But I have to say you: there is no supreme government, president, or authority, who would be able to do anything, when the God says, Enough...

Wow...

VW

P.P.S. Just to make sure you understand, this is New Life in Minsk, Belarus, not Colorado!!!!

Source: Transitions Online Belarus Country Blog, Nov. 5, 2006

ECONOMY

Moscow Showing Belarus The Energy Whip

By Vladimir Socor

Gazprom's threat to quadruple the price of gas to Belarus after December 31 to $200 per 1,000 cubic meters was meant to force Minsk into ceding 50% ownership of the state gas transport company Beltransgas to Gazprom. However, the threat seems to have the opposite effect thus far. President Alexander Lukashenka is publicly expressing an anger bordering on defiance, and the Economics Ministry is ruling out selling any share in Beltransgas to Gazprom unless the price of Russian gas is what Minsk officials describe as a "normal price" (Interfax, October 31).

The current year is the last one in which Moscow charges a "fraternal" price to Belarus of only $46.68 per 1,000 cubic meters. Thus, Moscow has plenty of room to hike the price after December 31 still below the market level (even by the Gazprom monopoly's definition of the market price). For its part, Minsk feels encouraged by the agreement that Gazprom just signed with Ukraine, setting the price in 2007 at $130 per 1,000 cubic meters -- below the Gazprom-defined market level as well.

Furthermore, in the event of a steep price hike (from the exceptionally low present level) by Gazprom, Belarus officials will insist on some form of compensation from the Russian government, such as a preferential credit to support the Belarus currency. Presenting the draft 2007 budget in parliament, Deputy Prime Minister Viktar Burya declared that it assumes on a gas price below $100 per 1,000 cubic meters and that the government would rule out any change to that premise (Interfax, October 27, 30).

Moscow and Minsk differ widely regarding the valuation of Beltransgas. Both sides have agreed to select the Netherlands-based ABN Amro Bank -- reputedly a Gazprom-friendly institution -- to appraise of Beltransgas prior to the possible 50% sale. To increase the pressure on Minsk, Gazprom wants to complete the sale and purchase of Beltransgas before December 31, thus linking it to the signing of the gas supply agreement for 2007. Minsk, however, prefers to postpone any decision into next year, so as to relieve the pressure in the end game for 2006 and retain counter leverage in negotiations that would continue next year. The 50% sale of Beltransgas to Gazprom was initially envisaged by an intergovernmental agreement in 2003, but Belarus has managed to resist and delay the process while still enjoying a preferential price from Russia thus far.

Russian gas deliveries to Belarus have fully covered the country's requirements and corresponding annual increments all along. The volume of deliveries was 21.5 billion cubic meters in 2006 and is envisaged at 21.7 billion in 2007 (Interfax, October 30). This increment is unusually small, reflecting bilateral tensions as well as the overstretch on Gazprom's available supplies for export.

Crude oil deliveries have also become a matter of dispute between Moscow and Minsk. Belarus is scheduled to import 19.75 million tons of Russian crude oil in 2006 -- approximately half of all Russian crude oil deliveries within the CIS -- and is requesting an increment for 2007 (Interfax, October 25, 30), all for refining in Belarus. Russian deliveries substantially exceed year after year the levels required to meet the internal demand in Belarus for refined products.

Belarus exports a large share of those refined products to third countries, earning high profits through the differences in export taxes applied in Russia and Belarus, respectively. Moscow is now pressing to eliminate those differences and those profits in Belarus.

Thanks to Russia's taxation method, Belarus is importing Russian crude oil at a substantial net discount compared to world prices. At the same time, the export of light refined products is taxed at $134 per ton in Russia (as of November 1) but only at $57 in Belarus. As a cumulative result, Russia now claims to be losing some $4 billion annually in terms of commercial and customs income. The Russian government recently asked Belarus to raise the export tax on light products to the same level as Russia and to hand over 85% of the proceeds thus obtained to Russia, and the Russian ambassador in Minsk, Alexander Surikov, publicly called for "resolving this issue this year, not later" (Interfax, October 25-26, 30, November 1). Such changes would hit the Belarus state budget severely.

> **"And if we are not able to reach agreement (with Belarus), then we would be forced to impose some restrictions"**
> **Russian President Putin**

Russian President Vladimir Putin warned on live television during his recent phone-in dialogue with Russian citizens: "There are several issues that worry us. We look at the volume of our crude oil that is delivered to Belarus' oil processing plants, we look at Belarus' actual requirements, and we see how much is being sold abroad as oil products. We need to improve things in normal dialogue with our Belarus colleagues. And if we are not able to reach agreement, then we would be forced to impose some restrictions" (Kremlin.ru, October 25).

Russia's state monopoly Transneft has already cut the volume of crude oil deliveries to Belarus by pipeline to 3 million tons, from the 4 million tons that were scheduled for the fourth quarter of 2006 (Interfax, October 30). Meanwhile, Russian oil companies are eyeing the refineries in Belarus for possible acquisition in shared ownership.

These Russian measures are not only economically motivated, but also designed to goad Belarus into yielding sovereignty and forming a "union state" with Russia under the threat of losing control over national assets. This is how Lukashenka and some of his closest confidants, such as Mikalay Charhinets, chairman of a parliamentary committee on foreign affairs and national security, interpret Moscow's latest moves regarding oil and gas. According

to Charhinets, these moves "amount in practice to a Russian economic war on Belarus....The Russian side is being inconsistent in its approach to forming a union state. Previously they were asking us to resolve the political issues [regarding the union state], but now we hear from the Russian president's mouth that economic integration has priority....The Russian leadership's position means that Belarus must consider other options to preserve its sovereignty and economic security." Charhinets went so far as to warn that Belarus could question the continuing presence of Russian military installations in Belarus (Interfax, October 25).

In a similar vein, an irate Lukashenka told a visiting Russian regional governor that Minsk "categorically opposes the tearing up of union relations and union agreements" -- that is, the switch of Moscow's priorities toward economic integration of Belarus with Russia. "Well, we don't want to sell certain state assets," he confirmed, alluding to the oil refineries. And, "Why is Russia building up a [customs] border with Belarus? In that case we can also start building up a customs border" (Interfax, October 31).

Lukashenka was responding to Putin's October 25 remark that "economic integration" must become the first stage toward creating a union state (Kremlin.ru, October 25). At present, the Kremlin's idea of "economic integration" implies a gradual takeover of the Belarus economy. Political "integration," in contrast, comes cost-free to Belarus and Lukashenka because it has been confined to public speech-making and unenforceable documents. However, Kremlin succession plans for 2008 may well envisage creating some real state structures for the Russia-Belarus Union as a possible job option for Putin after the expiry of his final constitutional term as president of Russia.

To create that option, the Kremlin brandishes an economic whip on Belarus. Lukashenka will counter in the accustomed way of "giving them rhetoric" for a nonexistent union state, but also in the novel way for him of making overtures to the West, which he now seems to start doing however cautiously.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor, November 2, 2006

Official Minsk Outraged by Moscow's Political Use of the Energy Leverage

By Vladimir Socor

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenka's visit to the Kremlin, scheduled for Friday, November 10, "will obviously be a rather difficult meeting," according to Russia's Ambassador in Minsk, Alexander Surikov, at a stage-setting news conference. Russia will not offer low-priced energy to Belarus, he warned, because "Russia and Belarus are two different states today....When we become a Union State, all these issues would be resolved. But we are not going to pay [energy subsidies] only for promises to join a Union State. Sorry." Meanwhile, the "creation of the Union State requires settling a host of issues" that will complicate Lukashenka's visit with Russian President Vladimir Putin, the ambassador announced (Interfax, Charter-97 website, November 3).

As long as the formation of the Union State is not advancing in practice, Russia -- according to Surikov at his briefing -- wants Belarus to take the following economic steps:

1) Hand over 50% of the national gas transport system, Beltransgas, to Gazprom, based on an expected valuation of $3.5 billion, of which Gazprom will [nominally] pay the half to Belarus. In that case, that sum would be deducted from Belarus' gas bill to Gazprom. The Russian side would, in that case, charge $140 per 1,000 cubic meters of gas to Belarus. These proposals seem designed to look like a softening of Moscow's position. The cited valuation of Beltransgas (forthcoming from the Gazprom-friendly ABN AmRo Bank) is higher than Minsk had thus far been led to expect; and the $140 price, lower than the $200 with which Gazprom had threatened Belarus. In Moscow on November 7, Gazprom deputy chairman Alexander Medvedev indirectly confirmed, "We are ready to accept assets from Belarus at the market price as payment for gas supplies" (Itar-Tass, November 7).

2) Turn over to Russia 85% of Belarus' tax revenue from the export of oil products made by Belarus refineries from Russian crude oil. Alternatively, turn over to Russia a corresponding share of oil products from Belarus refineries. If Minsk does not comply, Moscow will cut annual deliveries of crude oil to Belarus from the 19.75 million tons scheduled for in 2006 to only 8 million tons in 2007. The latter volume would cover Belarus' internal requirements for refined products, but would at one stroke terminate the country's lucrative exports of refined products from Russian crude. Pending Minsk's response, Russia's Industry and Energy Ministry will suspend any decision on the schedule of oil supplies to Belarus in 2007.

3) Accept the cessation of Russian deliveries of electricity due to anticipated shortages in Russia itself. Under a long-term agreement of intent in the framework of the nominal Union State, Russia is to deliver at least 4.5 billion kilowatt / hour to Belarus annually, which is approximately equal to the country's import requirement. Russia is actually delivering only 2.5 billion kwh in 2006, and Belarus has requested 3.3 billion kwh for 2007, thus still below Russia's commitment (Ukraine meanwhile fills that gap in Belarus). Apparently, advancing the formation of the Union State might not help maintain Russian electricity supplies to Belarus.

These warnings represent a continuation and even escalation of recent Russian pressures on Belarus to yield sovereignty under the threat of being forced to yield property to Russia. Official Minsk seems prepared to resist. After Mikalay Charhinets (see EDM, November 3), another Lukashenka confidant, Syarhey Kastsyan, head, like Charhinets, of a parliamentary commission on foreign policy, has expressed outrage and defiance: "All this is meant to force Belarus to join the Russian Federation with the status of a Russian guberniya through threats of economic suffocation.... We must look for opportunities to become independent of the whims of the neighboring coun-

try." In a similar vein, Lukashenka's political ally, the nominally pro-Moscow Syarhey Haidukevich, observes, "They told us specifically what they want from us. They want our economy" (Interfax; November 3).

The usual, anonymous "government official" who steps forward in such situations also observes, "This very much resembles an open blackmail using energy for the purpose of annexing Belarus. In Russia they reckon to substantially slow down the economic growth in Belarus and push the republic to enter into the Russian Federation....In practice, these are proposals to become a part of Russia. Unfortunately, Russia historically does not accept Belarus as a sovereign partner." This official is prepared to retaliate by questioning the legality of Russian ownership of oil product pipelines in Belarus (Interfax, November 3).

For now, Lukashenka is seeking alternative sources of energy supplies in talks with Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and most recently in Iran on November 5-7, ahead of his Kremlin visit.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor (Jamestown Foundation), Nov. 8, 2006

UN: No More Byelorussia or Weissrussland

On October 9-13 a conference was held with UN experts on geographical names participating. Experts from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Algeria, Israel, France, the Great Britain and the US arrived to the conference. The conference resulted in reaching a decision that Belarusian geographical names are to retain distinctive features of the Belarusian orthoepy.

The chief expert of map-making sector of the Belarusian state committee on property Natallya Auramenka reported that an instruction on transliteration had been created based on the Belarusian n Latin script (Lacinka), developed by Tarashkevich. According to her, now "Byelorussia" and "Weisrussland" are to disappear from maps all over the world, and only Belarus' is to remain.

In an interview to the newspaper *Nasha Niva* a linguist Zmitser Sauka expressed optimism concerning that decision. He sees the problem in Belarusian citizens proper. "A heated discussion started on the forum of the internet-page of *Komsomolskaya Pravda.* The most regrettable fact is that many citizens of our country do not see the difference between its real name and a colonial name of Soviet times". Mr. Sauka points out that because our country was called White Russia, many people in the West had been thinking that Belarus is a state in the West of Russia created by White Guard (White Russians).

In 2000 Instruction on transliteration of Belarusian geographical names with letters of Latin script was adopted by the Council of Ministers. However it hasn't been widely publicized.

Alyaksandr Navitski, one of the coordinators of the internet-site Lacinka.org, sees the positive aspect in adoption of the Belarusian-language version of geographic names at the international forum. However, he finds the Latin rendering of Belarusian geographic names inconsistent.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, Nov. 18, 2006

NEWS BRIEFS

The source of items in the NEWS BRIEFS section is the RFE/RL Newsline, unless otherwise indicated.

1. POLITICAL OPPOSITION

November 10, 2006

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LAUNCHES 'OPEN YOUR EYES' CAMPAIGN

Belarusian opposition parties have started an information campaign ahead of the local elections on January 14 to tell voters about the country's economic and political situation, Belapan reported on November 9. The campaign, named Rasplyushchy Vochy (Open Your Eyes), will involve volunteers distributing stickers among voters with texts reading, "Belarus ranks 67th in economic and social development, according to the UN. Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Russia are ahead of our country" and "the Ministry of Justice has not registered any political parties since 1999.

November 15, 2006

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION FIELDS SOME 1,000 CANDIDATES FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS

The united democratic opposition has registered some 1,000 candidates through the signature-collecting procedure for local elections scheduled to take place on January 14, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported on November 14. Authorities refused to register several prominent leaders of opposition parties and independent trade unions as candidates, including United Civic Party Chairman Anatol Lyabedzka, United Civic Party Deputy Chairman Yaraslau Ramanchuk, and trade unionists Alyaksandr Bukhvostau and Henadz Fyadynich.

November 16, 2006

RELEASED BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST VOWS TO STAY IN POLITICS

Former lawmaker Syarhey Skrabets, who was recently released from prison under an amnesty, told journalists on November 15 that he will continue to engage in politics, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. "I intend to resume political activities as soon as I'm quite recovered from the hunger strike," said Skrabets, who spent 18 months in prison. Skrabets also told journalists that former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, who has been on a hunger strike since October 20 in the same correctional facility from which Skrabets was released, is in a very bad physical condition. "Kazulin has lost some 17 kilograms, or more than 20 percent of his weight. Despite this, he feels good spiritually. He looks like skin and bones but keeps his head up," Skrabets said. Kazulin's wife, Iryna, visited the facility on November 15, but was not allowed to see her husband.

December 6, 2006

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITIONIST ON HUNGER STRIKE FOR ALMOST SEVEN WEEKS.

Iryna Kazulina on December 5 visited her husband, former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, who is serving his sentence of 5 1/2 years in a correctional facility near Vitsebsk, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Kazulin began a hunger strike on October 20, demanding that the UN Security

Council discuss the situation in Belarus. Kazulin also wants the opposition Political Council of United Prodemocratic Forces to send a statement about human rights violations in Belarus to the UN Security Council. Iryna Kazulina told journalists that her husband is not going to stop his fasting as long as his demands are unfulfilled. Kazulin reportedly lost 26 kilograms during his 46-day protest.

December. 13, 2006

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER RECEIVES SAKHAROV PRIZE

Former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich received the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought in Brussels on December 12, an RFE/RL correspondent reported. "This is not only my prize. Together with me, this prize also goes to all those Belarusians who are struggling for freedom, all those who came to the square this spring [during and after the presidential election] to defend their dignity, all those who were and still are imprisoned, those who were expelled from universities and who were fired from their job," Milinkevich said in his acceptance speech. Milinkevich noted that the EU -- which is barred from funding activities in other countries not sanctioned by their governments --lacks an efficient mechanism of assistance to pro-democracy movements under undemocratic regimes. Milinkevich advocated establishing a European "antidictatorship fund" to allow the EU to take direct action against authoritarian regimes. He pledged to donate his 50,000 euro ($65,900) check linked to the prize to the European Parliament to support victims of political persecution in Belarus.

December. 13, 2006

FORMER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ENDS HUNGER STRIKE

Another opposition presidential candidate, Alyaksandr Kazulin, on December 11 began to withdraw from his hunger strike, which he launched on October 20 in a correctional facility near Vitsebsk , RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported on December 12, quoting his wife Iryna Kazulina. Kazulina was allowed to speak with her husband by telephone on December 12. "I have learned that he is withdrawing from the hunger strike and feels satisfactory. We were allowed to talk only about stuff and food that he needs to withdraw from the strike," she told journalists. Kazulin, who is serving his 5 1/2 year prison term, demanded during his strike that the UN Security Council discuss the situation in Belarus. Reuters reported on December 12 that, earlier the same day, U.S. envoy to the UN William Brencick raised the issue of Kazulin's hunger strike at a closed-door UN Security Council session in New York. Brencick's motion reportedly angered Russian Ambassador to UN Vitaly Churkin, who called off the UN Security Council's planned discussion on Iran's controversial nuclear program.

2. REGIME ACTIONS and STATEMENTS

November 27, 2006

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT MAKES OFFER TO KYIV ON COORDINATING GAS-TRANSIT RATES

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka suggested to a group of Ukrainian journalists in Minsk on November 23 that Belarus and Ukraine could work out a joint stance on "oil and gas issues," including a coordinated policy on tariffs for Russian natural gas transited to Europe, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. "What if we pursued a single policy in talks with Russia on this matter?" Lukashenka said. "Would it be worse? It would be better. So let's do it." Lukashenka complained earlier in that interview about Moscow's declared intention to increase the price it charges Belarus for natural-gas exports in 2007 from the current rate of $47 per 1,000 cubic meters to possibly as much as $200. Lukashenka also suggested the possibility of raising tariffs for cargos in transit from and to Russia in order to make up for an anticipated Russian gas-price hike. "For instance, 100 million tons of cargos is annually transported from Western Europe to Russia and back via Belarus. We can earn a billion if we charge $10 per ton. And there will be no questions regarding the price of gas then," he said.

AND SUGGESTS UNION STATE WITH UKRAINE

President Lukashenka said in the same interview with Ukrainian journalists in Minsk on November 23 that he would welcome the idea of a union state with Ukraine as a more feasible political formation than the declared union with Russia because of the "comparable" sizes of Belarus and Ukraine, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. "Pray God it happens some time. Believe me, everybody would have to take this [Belarusian-Ukrainian] state into consideration. We would bargain a great deal from the world for our peoples," Lukashenka said.

November. 27, 2006

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT CLAIMS HE STOLE VOTES FROM HIMSELF

While speaking with Ukrainian journalists in Minsk on November 23, President Lukashenka admitted to rigging the March 19 presidential election, in which he officially obtained 83 percent of the vote, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. But Lukashenka claimed that he falsified the election in favor of his rivals. "Yes, we falsified the last election. I have already told the Westerners [about this]. As many as 93.5 percent of voters voted for President Lukashenka. But they said this was not a 'European' result. So we made it 86 [percent]," he said. "The Europeans told us before the election that if there were 'European' figures in the election, they would recognize our election. And we tried to make European figures," Lukashenka explained, noting that the move nevertheless has not resulted in recognition of the ballot. Meanwhile, Mikalay Lazavik, secretary of Belarus's Central Election Commission (TsVK), said on November 24 that the TsVK "is not aware of any fraud" in the March presidential election. According to Lazavik, the official results reflect the "genuine will" of the people.

December. 4, 2006

BELARUSIAN LOCAL ELECTION COMMISSIONS INCLUDE JUST ONE OPPOSITIONIST

Central Election Commission Secretary Mikalay Lazavik told Belapan on December 1 that there is just one representative of opposition parties among 70,877 people on 6,526 polling-station commissions for the January 14 local elections in Belarus. The person is reportedly a member of the United Civic Party.

December. 21, 2006

BELARUSIAN LEGISLATURE PASSES BILL ON EXTREMISM

The Council of the Republic, Belarus's upper house of parliament, on December 20 passed a bill on preventing and combating extremism, Belapan reported. The bill defines extremism as steps by political parties, public, religious, and other organiza-

tions as well as Belarusian and foreign citizens to plan, prepare, and commit acts aimed at overthrowing the constitutional system, the establishment of illegal armed groups, and conducting terrorist activities. Stsyapan Sukharenka, chairman of the Committee for State Security (KGB), described the bill during the session as "extremely necessary" ahead of what he called "events prepared" by the opposition. In particular, Sukharenka warned, opposition forces are planning to carry out civil-disobedience campaigns aimed at changing the existing constitutional order during local elections in January. The bill on extremism was already passed by the lower house in October and rejected by the upper house several days later. The government subsequently presented the rejected bill without any revisions to the legislature, which passed it without reservations this time.

AND ON 2007 BUDGET

Also on December 20, the Council of the Republic adopted a 2007 budget bill, Belapan reported. The bill predicts next year's consolidated budget revenues to be 40.4 trillion rubles ($18.8 billion) and spending at 41.8 trillion rubles, with a deficit equal to 1.5 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). According to the budget estimates, GDP will grow by 9 percent and the annual inflation rate will total 7 percent in 2007.

3. REPRESSIONS

November 2, 2006

BELARUSIAN YOUTH ACTIVIST SENTENCED TO 18 MONTHS IN PRISON

Judge Ala Bulash of Minsk's Kastrychnitski District Court sentenced Zmitser Dashkevich, a leader of the opposition group Youth Front, on November 1 to 18 months in a minimum-security correctional institution, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. Dashkevich was punished under an article of the Criminal Code that prohibits running an unregistered organization. The article was added to the Criminal Code in December 2005 as part of amendments that introduced harsh penalties "for activities directed against people and public security." "The regime has made another signal that any unregistered organization has no right to conduct activities here," Anatol Lyaukovich, leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party, told RFE/RL. "It is the natural logic of a [repressive] regime, which can only become tougher. If it shows a sign of weakness, it will collapse," he added. Some 300 young people demonstrated in front of the court during the announcement of the verdict. "It is just local support, because on the whole people don't know what's taking place in the country and how many political prisoners we have," human rights defender Lyudmila Hraznova said.



Zmitser Dashkevich

Nov. 20, 2006

BELARUSIAN POSTAL SERVICE REFUSES TO DISTRIBUTE NONSTATE NEWSPAPERS

Belposhta, Belarus's state postal service that holds a monopoly over the distribution of subscription periodicals, has denied distribution in the first six months of 2007 to major nationwide independent newspapers and many local independent newspapers, Belapan reported on November 17, quoting Zoya Mardas from the Belarusian Association of Journalists. In particular, Belposhta rejected the nationwide newspapers *Narodnaya volya, Nasha Niva, Tovarishch*, and *Svobodnye novosti plus*, as well as the local newspapers *Brestsky kurer, Vitebsky kurer, Borisovskie novosti, Gazeta slonimskaya Volnaye Hlybokaye, Hantsavitski chas*, and *Myastsovy chas*. "To requests by the publications to enter them in the Belposhta subscription catalogue, the Belposhta management's stereotyped answer was: 'Since the law does not oblige the organization to include a periodical in its catalogue, it is the right of Belposhta to choose publications for the catalogue,'" Mardas said.

4. PROTEST ACTIONS

October. 10, 2006

BELARUS'S PROTESTANT COMMUNITY GOES ON HUNGER STRIKE OVER EVICTION

Some 100 members of New Life Church, a Minsk-based Protestant community, continued their hunger strike for a fifth consecutive day on October 9, protesting a court order to transfer their prayer house in Minsk to the city authorities, Belapan reported. Alyaksandr Karamyshau, a judge of the Minsk City Economic Court, on July 21 ordered New Life Church to sell its building for the equivalent of $17,500 to the Minsk City Executive Committee. The community replied that it will not to vacate its prayer house voluntarily.

October. 20, 2006

BELARUSIAN INDEPENDENT TRADE UNIONISTS ON HUNGER STRIKE OVER DISCRIMINATION

Four independent trade unionists at a tire factory in Babruysk on October 19 joined a hunger strike launched by their colleague Alena Zakhozhaya on October 3, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. They are protesting what they say is discrimination against fellow union members by the state petrochemical concern Belnaftakhim. Belnaftakhim reportedly refused to register their trade union organization and failed to deliver benefits promised under the terms of a collective bargaining agreement. Meanwhile, the same day a high-ranking Belarusian delegation headed by Deputy Prime Minister Andrey Kabyakou started two-day talks with the International Labor Organization (ILO) in Geneva. The talks focus on the observance of trade unions' rights in Belarus and the country's progress in implementing the recommendations that the ILO gave to the Belarusian government two years ago

December. 4,, 2006

BELARUSIAN ROMAN CATHOLICS GO ON HUNGER STRIKE OVER CHURCH-CONSTRUCTION PERMIT

A Roman Catholic priest and 11 female members of his parish went on a hunger strike in Hrodna, northwestern Belarus, on December 1 to protest the local authorities' refusal to grant the parish a permit for the construction of a church, Belapan reported. Father Alyaksandr Shemet told the agency that his community of 8,000 parishioners currently has two chapels that can accommo-

date some 320 people at a time. The community first filed an official request for a plot of land to build a church on in 1998.

3. ECONOMY

November 17, 2006

BELARUS TO ASK FOR COMPENSATION IF RUSSIA RAISES GAS PRICE

Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said on November 17 that Belarus should buy natural gas at Russia's domestic price, Belapan and Reuters reported. "The essence of our policy is that both Belarusians and Russians are one people and that means that conditions also should be equal," Lukashenka said while visiting the Belshyna tire factory in Babruysk. Lukashenka said Minsk will demand compensation from Moscow for transit expenses.

November 29, 2006

PUTIN SAYS NO MORE DISCOUNTED GAS FOR BELARUS

Russian President Vladimir Putin told journalists after a meeting with President Lukashenka on the sidelines of the CIS summit in Minsk on November 28 that Russia will switch to market relations with all its partners with no exception, Belapan reported. Asked about the establishment of a Belarusian-Russian joint venture to run Beltranshaz, Belarus's gas-pipeline network, and the price of Russian gas for Belarus in 2007, Putin noted that relevant decisions will be of a market nature. "Independent appraisers have in fact finished their work to appraise Beltranshaz. There is an agreement at the expert level on methods of reaching a final decision," Putin said. He explained that the gas price will be partly capitalized into the value of Beltranshaz, and that Gazprom and Beltranshaz would establish the joint enterprise on a 50-50 basis. The Dutch ABN AMRO bank reportedly concluded an appraisal of Beltranshaz's assets and informed Minsk and Moscow about its results last week, but no figure has thus far been made public. "A seller always see a price as low, whereas a buyer always thinks that it is high," Belarusian Deputy Prime Minister Andrey Kabyakou said of the Dutch appraisal on November 28, adding that talks with Gazprom on the sale of a 50 percent stake in Beltranshaz "do not proceed smoothly."

December. 1, 2006

BELARUSIAN OFFICIAL ANNOUNCES 'RELATIVELY CLOSE' VALUE OF BELTRANSHAZ

Belarusian Deputy Economy Minister Aleh Melnikau told journalists in Minsk on November 30 that the Dutch ABN AMRO bank has estimated the value of Beltranshaz, Belarus's gas pipeline operator, at "relatively close" to $3.5 billion, Belapan and "Kommersant" reported. Russian President Vladimir Putin said in Minsk earlier this week that Belarus and Russia "have agreed in advance" to accept the appraisal of Beltranshaz made by the Dutch evaluator. Russia's government-controlled gas giant, Gazprom, has sought to acquire a 50 percent stake in Beltranshaz for several years but has not been able to agree on a price with Minsk. Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka suggested earlier this month that Beltranshaz may be worth as much as $12 billion and that the Dutch appraisal would mean little in talks with Gazprom on establishing a joint venture to control Belarusian gas pipelines . Russian newspapers speculate that by selling a 50 percent stake in Beltranshaz to Gazprom, Minsk will be able to receive Russian gas at $120-$130 per 1,000 cubic meters for up to 18 months starting in January 2007. Gazprom signaled earlier this year that it wants to increase its gas price for Belarus in 2007 to $200 per 1,000 cubic meters from the current $47.

December. 4, 2006

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT WANTS TO BUILD NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said at a government conference on December 1 that only the construction of a nuclear power plant in Belarus would guarantee the country's national security and provide it with cheap energy, Belapan reported, citing official information sources. Lukashenka expressed confidence that citizens will support the idea of constructing a nuclear power plant if they are "correctly informed" about the country's energy situation and economic prospects. Belarusian National Academy of Sciences head Mikhail Myasnikovich said at the same conference that the first power unit of a future nuclear plant could be put into operation in 2013. Myasnikovich added that, according to experts, the best location for the plant would be Chavusy Raion in Mahilyou Oblast, some 100 kilometers from Belarus's border with Russia. Lukashenka reportedly ordered that the government submit proposals for the construction of the plant as soon as possible.

December. 15, 2006

BELARUS ACCUSES MOSCOW OF VIOLATING TRADE ACCORDS BY IMPOSING CRUDE OIL TAX

Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrey Papou told journalists on December 14 that Russia's recent decision to charge a duty of some $180 per ton on crude oil exports to Belarus as of January 2007 (see "RFE/RL Newsline," December 13, 2006) violates several bilateral agreements on free trade, Belapan reported. At present, Russia supplies crude oil to Belarusian refineries without levying any customs duties. President Lukashenka is scheduled to talk with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, in Moscow on December 15. Russian political scientist Sergei Karaganov, head of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy think tank, told RFE/RL's Belarus Service on December 14 that the Kremlin has lost all hope that by offering economic support and preferences to Lukashenka it may persuade him to integrate Belarus closer with Russia. "It is senseless to pump Russian money into a bottomless barrel. Particularly since the Belarusian people do not receive anything from it, and the largest part of the money goes to Lukashenka's entourage and power structures. With all my respect to them, I do not think that Russia should subsidize them," Karaganov said.

4. BELARUS and the WORLD

October 17, 2006

EU GRANTS SCHOLARSHIPS TO BELARUSIAN STUDENTS

The European Commission on October 16 announced a scholarship program for Belarusian students expelled from universities because of the opposition to the regime of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, dpa and Reuters reported. The EU is offering scholarships worth 5 million euros ($6.3 million) to give expelled students the chance to continue their studies in neighboring countries such as Lithuania and Ukraine. EU funds will cover tuition fees and living expenses for 170 masters and 35 bachelor programs for new students in the European Humanities University in Vilnius as well as living expenses for Belarusian students already enrolled there. The three-year-program also includes scholarships for 100 students in Ukraine and other neigh-

boring countries. Financial aid will be granted to students who have been accepted by a host university and who have demonstrated that they cannot study in Belarus.

November 21, 2006
EU OFFERS BELARUS INCENTIVES TO DEMOCRATIZATION.

The European Commission has prepared a new strategy of relations with Belarus, offering that country's government significant economic incentives in exchange for fulfilling 12 conditions on the path toward democratization, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on November 20. In particular, Brussels pledges to open its markets for Belarusian commodities, to give financial support to Belarusian companies, to provide more scholarships for Belarusian students, to streamline visa formalities for Belarusians, and to offer help in implementing economic and self-government reforms. Minsk, in its turn, would have to release political prisoners, halt persecution of the opposition, investigate the disappearances of political opponents of the regime in 1999-2000, ensure fair court trials, respect minority rights, and hold free elections. In essence, Brussels is reportedly inviting Minsk to conclude a new accord on partnership to replace the previous one, which was frozen following the deeply flawed constitutional referendum in Belarus in 1996.

WHICH ARE MET WITH MIXED REACTION FROM OPPOSITION

Former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich has welcomed the EU's offer of a new strategy toward Belarus, Belapan reported on November 20. "[Official] propagandists are constantly telling Belarusians that they cannot count on the EU, as they say we're not welcome in Europe. And here we get a document that confirms that the EU is waiting for Belarus, is waiting for democratic changes in our country.... This strategy can prove very helpful for fighting the apathy that has gripped Belarusian society," Milinkevich said. Meanwhile, United Civic Party Deputy Chairman Ihar Shynkaryk said he does not believe that Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka could meet this strategy halfway. "The official Minsk will not agree to implement this strategy. As long as Lukashenka remains the head of state, he will not conduct a [genuine] investigation into the political disappearances. I also do not believe that Lukashenka could release all politically persecuted people from prison," Shynkaryk told RFE/RL's Belarus Service.

December. 11, 2006
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES PASSES 'BELARUS DEMOCRACY REAUTHORIZATION ACT'

The U.S. House of Representatives on December 8 passed a piece of legislation titled the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act of 2006, which extends the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 for 2007 and 2008, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. "As one who has worked for freedom in Belarus over many, many years, I remain deeply concerned that the Belarusian people continue to be subjected to the arbitrary and self-serving whims of a corrupt and antidemocratic regime headed by Alyaksandr Lukashenka," Representative Chris Smith, who authored the bill, said during debate in the House of Representatives. The bill reportedly authorizes $27.5 million in funding for democracy-building activities in Belarus. The bill also bans the U.S. government from providing financial assistance to Belarus, except for humanitarian aid, until Minsk conducts a thorough inquiry into the 1999-2000 disappearances of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's opponents, releases political prisoners, drops charges against opposition figures, and ends the prosecution of independent media and pro-democracy organizations.

December 13, 2006
EXILED BELARUSIAN UNIVERSITY RECEIVES $6 MILLION FROM EU, NORDIC COUNTRIES

The European Commission and the Nordic Council of Ministers have allocated 4.5 million euros ($6 million) to European Humanities University (EHU) in Vilnius, Belapan reported on December 12. EHU, a private institution established in Minsk in 1992, was stripped of its license by order of Belarusian Education Minister Alyaksandr Radzkou in July 2004. It was reestablished in Lithuania in 2005 as European Humanities University in Exile. EHU Rector Anatol Mikhaylau told Belapan that the received aid will be spent to pay housing rents and allowances for Belarusian students admitted to EHU in 2005 and 2006. Mikhaylau said the average monthly student allowance at EHU amounts to 100 euros ($133).

December 20, 2006
CANADA IMPOSES ECONOMIC SANCTIONS ON BELARUS

Canada has imposed trade sanctions on Belarus in a bid to pressure the country's rulers to respect human rights and democracy, Reuters reported on December 19. Under the sanctions, Canadian exports to Belarus will now require an official export permit, and officials say these permits will generally be denied except for humanitarian exports of food, clothing, and medicine. In a written statement, Canadian Foreign Minister Peter MacKay cited flawed elections and the continued imprisonment of democracy supporters as examples of the flagrant abuse of human rights and the rule of law on the part of Belarusian authorities. Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrey Papou said the Canadian sanctions are a short-sighted move, Belapan reported. According to Papou, more than 60 Canadian exporters to Belarus petitioned the government against the restrictions. "But their interests, as well as the interests of the Belarusian people, were ignored," Papou added.

December 22, 2006
EU TAKES TRADE MEASURES AGAINST BELARUS

The European Commission on December 21 announced that it will withdraw tariff preferences granted to Belarus under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) if the country fails to improve its poor labor standards within the next six months, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and dpa reported. The EU move comes after a commission inquiry established systematic violations of core labor rights in Belarus, including the freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. "Where countries systematically flout core labor standards, we need to be prepared to act. This decision is a test case of our collective commitment to the promotion of workers rights as an integral part of our trade policy," EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson told journalists. Currently some 12 percent of Belarus's exports to the EU are shipped under reduced GSP tariffs. According to estimates, the withdrawal of GSP benefits for Belarusian exports of wood, chemicals, and textiles could result in annual losses to Minsk of some $300 million euros ($400 million) in trade with the EU.

Thoughts and Observations

What Did Kazulin Achieve With Hunger Strike?

By Jan Maksymiuk

Opposition leader Alyaksandr Kazulin, who is serving a 5 1/2 year prison term for his role in challenging the results of Belarus's last presidential election, ended his 53-day hunger strike on December 11. Kazulin's main demand -- that the UN Security Council discuss the situation in Belarus -- has not been fulfilled. However, the international and domestic reactions that Kazulin's protest generated indicate the effort was not made in vain.

Alyaksandr Kazulin was arrested on March 25 and sentenced to 5 1/2 years in a correctional facility for his role in leading street protests in Minsk following the fraudulent presidential election in Belarus on March 19. Together with Alyaksandr Milinkevich, Kazulin unsuccessfully ran against incumbent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in that election. Lukashenka officially won 83 percent of the vote, while Milinkevich garnered 6 percent, and Kazulin 2 percent.

Kazulin went on hunger strike on October 20, pledging not to end it until the UN Security Council placed Belarus's human-rights situation on its agenda and until he was convinced that "the international community will devote its attention to Belarus." Kazulin also called on Prime Minister Syarhey Sidorski "to take over" the country, asserting that Lukashenka cannot be considered a legitimate president, seeing that his second term expired in September.

As with previous hunger strikes by oppositionists, nobody expected the Belarusian authorities to pay any particular attention to Kazulin's protest, let alone heed his demand that Lukashenka should resign. True to form, the government-controlled media remained silent on Kazulin during his entire 53-day fast.

Milinkevich, concerned about Kazulin's deteriorating health, in early December called on him to stop his protest. "One of [Kazulin's] demands -- that the UN Security Council view the Belarus issue -- cannot be fulfilled. The council will not consider such an issue -- even the Cuba issue has not been raised there, because there are those who can block it," Milinkevich reasoned. However, Milinkevich made a point to mention Kazulin's courage when accepting the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought in Strasbourg on December 12. Milinkevich acknowledged in his acceptance speech that the prize was not his alone, as it was also earned by other politicians and ordinary Belarusians who defy Lukashenka's rule. He singled out Kazulin by name: "[Kazulin] has been on hunger strike for two months in jail now. His condition is very grave. His life is under serious threat. This award also belongs to him."

Previously, both Milinkevich and the Political Council of United Pro-Democratic Forces, the Belarusian opposition's coordinating body, sent appeals to the leaders of G8 countries to put the human rights situation in Belarus on the UN Security Council agenda. On December 8 -- the same day some 500 people in Belarus went on a one-day hunger strike in solidarity with the fasting Kazulin --the UN human rights rapporteur on Belarus, Adrian Severin, expressed his "deepest concern" over the opposition leader's health condition. A day later a statement issued by the German Embassy in Belarus on behalf of the European Union called on the Belarusian government to "promptly release" Kazulin.

These efforts both at home and abroad may have contributed to Kazulin's decision to halt his protest, even though his basic demands have not been fulfilled. But his aim that the world "devote its attention to Belarus" may have been partially met. **The most sensational development regarding Kazulin's protest came late on December 12 in New York, when U.S. envoy to the UN William Brencick raised the issue during a closed-door UN Security Council session.** The U.S. move reportedly angered Russian Ambassador to UN Vitaly Churkin to such an extent that he called off the UN Security Council's planned discussion on Iran's nuclear program. According to Yury Khadyka, deputy chairman of the opposition Belarusian Popular Front, the diplomatic row in New York was a big moral victory for Kazulin. "[Kazulin] survived an unbelievably tough hunger strike and achieved an unbelievable goal: the problem of human rights in Belarus has been put [on the international agenda]," Khadyka said. "[This week] we had the U.S. decision [to raise the Kazulin issue in the UN Security Council] and the presentation of the Sakharov Prize to Milinkevich. These events testify that the world, even if with difficulty, is beginning to pay attention to the situation of lawlessness in Belarus."

Subsequently, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement condemning Washington's proposal to view the Kazulin case in the UN Security Council as an attempt "to turn the Security Council into a platform for discussing issues dictated by U.S. domestic-policy interests."

True or not, there was at least one aspect of the U.S. step regarding Kazulin that was not mentioned in Moscow's note. Belarusian human rights defender Ales Byalyatski told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that in making its proposal in the Security Council, the U.S. government in effect also expressed its concern over whether Kazulin will die in prison or not. "The fact that [Washington] took such a step shows that the human rights situation in Belarus is very grave," Byalyatski said. "But [this step] also manifests normal concern for the health of a human being on the part of those people in the U.S. government who took this decision. This decision is in stark contrast to how the Belarusian authorities behave themselves."

Hunger strikes by political opponents of undemocratic regimes are often seen as an act of utter desperation and a protest of last resort. While Kazulin's fast did little to alter this general perception, it nevertheless confirmed that such protests can still arouse emotions of solidarity and moral support -- at least in some parts of the world.

Source: RFE/RL Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, December 21, 2006

Will the Opposition Boycott Local Elections in Belarus?

By David Marples

On January 14, 2007, voters in Belarus will again go to the polls to elect local governments. The opposition, including the United Democratic Forces (UDF) movement, is debating the wisdom of participating in another election that is little more than a façade. A majority, encouraged by supporters outside the country, has opted to do so. However, there is a groundswell of informed opinion that suggests that a boycott of elections in which equal access to the media and election commissions is denied to the opposition is a more logical policy.

That conditions are weighted in favor of the regime is hardly in doubt. In at least two of the six regional commissions organizing these elections (Mahileu and Brest), there is not a single representative of the opposition. This is reportedly also the case also with the commission formed in the city of Minsk. On October 12, the Central Election Commission, chaired by the president's close ally, Lidziya Yarmoshyna, announced that the process of nominating representatives to the territorial election commissions would end on October 17. That decision limited the possibility of many opposition delegates submitting their documents in time. The election rules, amended by the government according to Presidential Decree No. 607, require a single round based on a first-past-the post system.

The arguments against a boycott are that the elections, however rigged, offer opportunities to mobilize democratic forces.

The opposition has no problems with the timeline for running as deputies. This stage begins on November 5 and ends one month later. It is anticipated that some 700-900 opposition candidates will run for the 22,641 seats. They are led by the United Civic Party (203 members running for local councils), the Party of the Belarusian Popular Front (about 180), the Party of Communists (130), and the Social-Democratic Party (100) led by the imprisoned former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, who recently started another hunger strike to protest his sentence. UDF leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich is not running personally but is serving as the supporter of a large group of candidates.

In an article in the Narodnaya volya newspaper, Anatol Lyabedzka, leader of the United Civic Party, suggests that the UDF should hold a Congress of Democratic Forces and combine it with a discussion about the strategy for electing delegates to local councils. Lyabedzka has for some time tried to pressure Milinkevich, who appears again in the role of rival rather than partner, to hold such a Congress. But there would be little time to develop a strategy for a meaningful election campaign.

Critiques of the opposition and its readiness to run in another election are manifest. Writing in Narodnaya volya, Dr. Vyachaslau Orhish noted that it would be a small miracle if the local councils contained more than 50 democrats after the January elections. He commented that opposition leaders were banging their heads against a brick wall. After every election, he remarked, they simply rush into the next one without taking any steps to try to establish equal conditions for the campaign participants. They have no access to the state TV, radio, or the press, and the election commissions are oriented toward the promotion of pro-government candidates. "Under such circumstances," he writes, "it is not possible to realize the democratic alternative through elections."

Orhish is particularly critical of Milinkevich, a man "who claims to be" the leader of the political opposition, and who participates in the elections because they provide an opportunity to present democratic ideas to the Belarusian people. The implication is that the United Democratic Forces can have limited public impact under the unequal conditions. Elections thus bolster rather than weaken the authoritarian regime of Lukashenka.

This opinion finds resonance with at least two opposition groups: the Conservative Christian Party of the BPF, led by the exiled Zyanon Paznyak, maintains that it is senseless to take part in elections under the present circumstances. To participate in them is to mislead themselves and the voters. The leader of the Social Democratic Hramada, Stanislau Shushkevich, likewise maintains that the opposition should stop playing into the hands of the regime. The new Electoral Code, in his view, leaves little chance for the opposition to succeed in the January elections in which "only fools may participate." Kazulin, despite the decision of his party to participate, made similar comments in September, but his party evidently ignored his advice.

The arguments against a boycott are that the elections, however rigged, offer opportunities to mobilize democratic forces. Yet participation followed by inevitable defeat not only helps to solidify the Lukashenka regime, but also conveys the impression that the democrats' cause is hopeless. Hans-Georg Wieck, former head of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus, asserted recently that Lukashenka is facing a crisis (a "dead-end road"), but no such predicament is evident to the Belarusian electorate. The UDF performed creditably in the presidential election, but it did not unite all democratic forces, nor did it succeed in altering significantly the conditions under which elections are held. It lost in part because it failed to convince the electorate that democratic change was more important than (perceived) economic security.

The democratic opposition may need to rethink its strategies rather than simply respond to initiatives of the regime, including elections under constantly changing rules that ensure "elegant" presidential victories.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor, October 26, 2006.

QUOTES of QUARTER

"Why can't a man think as he wishes? He committed no crime, he did not kill, steal, nor insult (anyone),"

complained the father of **ZMITSER DASHKEVICH,** who was sentenced on October 30 to a year and a half for taking part in an "unregistered" organization, the Young Front

Opposition Leader Receives Sakharov Prize

Ahto Lobjakas

Belarusian opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich today received the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought.

In an emotional speech, Alyaksandr Milinkevich acknowledged the sacrifices made by other politicians, students, and ordinary Belarusians and dedicated the prize to all those who oppose President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's rule. "This is not only my prize. Together with me, this prize also goes to all those Belarusians who are struggling for freedom, all those who came to the square this spring [during and after the presidential election] to defend their dignity, all those who were and still are imprisoned, those who were expelled from universities and who were fired from their job," Milinkevich said.

Speaking in Belarusian, Milinkevich called attention in particular to the plight of former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, who was sentenced to 5 1/2 years in prison for his role in street rallies that followed Lukashenka's reelection. Kazulin had refused food for nearly two months before his wife confirmed today he had ended his hunger strike.

The ceremony for the award -- named after Nobel prizewinner Andrei Sakharov, a strong advocate of reforms and civil liberties in the Soviet Union -- was led by the president of the European Parliament, Josep Borrell. During his speech in Strasbourg, Borrell condemned Belarus as "Europe's last dictatorship." EU external-relations commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner issued a statement in Brussels saying the prize "recognizes Aleksander Milinkevich's personal efforts, and the efforts of all those in Belarus who strive for democracy at their own personal risk." Ferrero-Waldner also said the award serves as a reminder of the EU's resolve to work for freedom and democracy in Belarus.

During his speech and the press conference that followed, Milinkevich called for more EU support, although he avoided direct criticism of Brussels. It was left to Borrell to note that despite all EU efforts, the situation in Belarus has deteriorated markedly since 2004, when the Belarusian Association of Journalists was the recipient of the Sakharov Prize. Milinkevich, who said he will donate his 50,000 euro ($65,900) check to the European Parliament (to be used for assistance to repressed activists), strove to place Belarus's plight in a broader context. He said the EU must review the way it interacts with dictatorships at large, and not treat them as ordinary, legitimate regimes. The EU has so far been barred from funding activities in other countries not sanctioned by their governments. Instead, Milinkevich called for a European "anti-dictatorship fund" to allow the EU to take direct action against authoritarian regimes. "What the united Europe is missing is a mechanism of concrete assistance to those struggling inside undemocratic countries -- it is not Belarus alone that suffers from injustice," Milinkevich said. "The European Union has practically no such mechanisms today. The European Union was created to help those who have chosen the democratic path and who want to follow that path. And the European Union should urgently work out flexible assistance programs for those who are under dictatorships."

But the Belarusian opposition leader also displayed a new awareness that change in his country cannot be brought about by outside pressure. He offered a bleak analysis of the prospects of Lukashenka's regime, saying its members now resist attempts by Russia to buy up the country's infrastructure fearing they'd be stripped of their status.

On the other hand, Milinkevich said, the regime also knows "democracy would kill it." Hence, Milinkevich concluded, "no elections" can change the situation in Belarus. Instead, he called for massive street action, saying he would take opportunities ahead of the upcoming legislative elections to create awareness of this need. "A dictatorship never wants to go away on its own. And we say absolutely frankly that it is impossible to change the situation in our country by elections, just as it has been impossible under other dictatorships," Milinkevich said. "Therefore, we believe in street action. We want a great number of people to come out to the streets and say to this government, by peaceful means, that there is no place for dictatorship on Belarusian soil."

Milinkevich also appealed to the EU not to increase visa costs for Belarusian citizens, slated to rise to more than 60 euros ($80) next year. EU member states agreed earlier this year not to raise visa rates for countries with which it has negotiated or is negotiating a visa-facilitation agreement. These include Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova. Belarus, however, will not qualify for visa relief, as cooperation with Lukashenka's regime remains conditional on democratic reforms. Milinkevich also said planned economic measures against Belarus might do more harm than good. The EU is considering removing Belarus from its most-favored-nations list later this month. Brussels argues this is necessary less as a response to Minsk's intransigence than simply as a reaction to the absence of independent trade unions in the country. Earlier this week, however, commissioner Ferrero-Waldner said the EU could postpone the move by six months to give Lukashenka a "period of grace."

Source: RFE/RL Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, Dec. 12, 2006

QUOTES of QUARTER

"When the threat to independence of Belarus becomes real, I am ready to stand beside Alexander Milinkevich and defend it"

VACLAV HAVEL at the Forum 2000 conference on October 9, in Prague

"I believe that the Balkan states... should belong to the European Union, as should Belarus and Ukraine."

former Czech President **VACLAV HAVEL** on October 5 at his 70th birthday celebration in Prague

Minsk Tightens Grip at Home, But Seeks New Friends Abroad

By Jan Maksymiuk

When a Minsk district court sentenced an opposition youth activist to prison for his work with an unregistered organization, it was just the latest step in the inconspicuous, but relentless campaign by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to eradicate any meaningful dissent in Belarus.

But the isolated autocrat, facing uncertainty over Russian gas supplies, appears to be launching another kind of campaign as well. Lukashenka has recently made several political gestures that may signal his intention to repair his wobbly standing in the international arena.

When the court sentenced opposition Youth Front leader Zmitser Dashkevich to 18 months in prison on November 1, it cited an article added to the Belarusian Criminal Code just ahead of the March presidential election. The article, prohibiting the work of "unregistered organizations," was among a set of amendments introducing harsh penalties for "activities directed against people and public security."

Vintsuk Vyachorka, head of the opposition Belarusian Popular Front, said the sentencing of the 25-year-old Dashkevich was routine for a regime that shuns any notion of democratizing the country's political environment. Dashkevich's case "was chosen as an example to caution others," she said. "There is nothing unexpected in this [sentence], even though it would appear that, confronted with the economic problems that will inevitably worsen next year, Lukashenka could show at least window-dressing liberalism. But he decided not to do that, he decided to continue fighting against the Belarusian people. It is a challenge for all of us."

The Lukashenka regime's repression of its political opponents culminated shortly after this year's March 19 presidential election. Rights activists say more than 1,000 supporters of the contest's two independent opposition candidates, Alyaksandr Milinkevich and Alyaksandr Kazulin, were jailed for up to 15 days.

Fewer prison sentences have been handed down in the seven months that followed, but in cases like Dashkevich's, where penalties were handed down, they were far harsher than before. In July, Kazulin was sentenced to 5 1/2 years in prison for his role in the street protests that followed Lukashenka's overwhelming reelection in the presidential vote. In August, a court sentenced four independent election observers -- Mikalay Astreyka, Tsimafey Dranchuk, Enira Branitskaya, and Alyaksandr Shalayka -- to prison terms ranging from six months to two years. The four were found guilty of being involved in an unregistered organization that "infringes upon the interests and rights of citizens."

Anatol Lyaukovich, temporarily standing in for Kazulin as head of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party, says he believes the government will continue to stifle any uncontrolled public activity in order to prevent a rise in public dissent. Repression, he says, has simply become a way of life for the Lukashenka regime. "The regime has sent yet another strong signal that no unregistered organization has the right to conduct activities here," he says. "It is a warning to both old and young [opposition] leaders that all of them will be there [in prison]. It is the natural logic of a [repressive] regime, which can only become tougher. If it shows a sign of weakness, it will collapse."

But in addition to the usual sticks, Lukashenka has also recently offered a few carrots. Earlier this year, Lukashenka signed a decree making it easier for independent trade unions to register. And in October, a high-ranking Belarusian delegation traveled to Geneva to meet with the International Labor Organization for talks on the observation of union rights in Belarus. Both were surprisingly progressive moves, and may have been prompted by the plan in Brussels to suspend trade benefits to Belarus under the European Union's Generalized System of Preferences for developing countries.

Minsk has sent other signals of its intention to improve relations with Europe as well. Uladzimir Kanaplyou, speaker of Belarus's lower house of parliament, the Chamber of Representatives, recently held talks in Moscow with Rene van der Linden, head of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Belarus is the only European country that is not represented in PACE. And Lukashenka, while meeting a parliamentary delegation of the Republic of South Africa in Minsk, declared that Belarus is "essentially building a new foreign policy."

Some Belarusian analysts believe that Lukashenka's words may be more than just another empty declaration. They argue that Minsk, anticipating a future of higher prices for Russian gas and cooler relations with Moscow, may be trying to patch up its poor reputation in the West.

So should Lukashenka be taken at his word? Does his promise of a "new foreign policy" mean a thaw in the Belarusian regime? Opposition leader Milinkevich, who unsuccessfully challenged Lukashenka in the March presidential vote, says no. He says Dashkevich's prison sentence is convincing proof that Europe should not harbor any illusions about whether Lukashenka may democratize his rule.

"This verdict is not only unjust but that it is also a verdict against all of Belarusian youth," he says. "It is another signal to Europe -- a Europe which thinks: 'What if suddenly [Lukashenka changes]? Maybe it's necessary to cooperate with this regime. Maybe it's necessary to leave the door ajar.' But this regime doesn't give a damn about all these proposals and it won't make a single step to meet them halfway. There is no sense in meetings or cooperation with this regime unless it demonstrates at least one single time that it has halted political persecution."

During Dashkevich's trial, some 200 young people gathered outside the court building in a show of solidarity. But human rights defender Lyudmila Hraznova says opposition supporters are too scarce to have any effect on the ruling regime. "Of course, this support is insufficient and local. It is known only to us, while for the remainder of Belarusian society it is a closed book," she says. "People don't know what's taking place in the country, people don't

know how many political prisoners have been put behind bars."

Is the opposition in Belarus doomed to disappear altogether, as Lukashenka predicted before the presidential vote in March, or transform into increasingly isolated and desperate groups of dissenters? Alyaksey Shydlouski, who spent 18 months in prison in 1997-98 for writing antipresidential graffiti, believes that opposition activists have to persevere with their efforts, even if it invariably leads them to prison.

"Nine years ago, I myself was in the same situation [as Dashkevich]," he say. "One needs to hold one's ground and be strong, because prison is prison, it has its own laws, and one simply needs to get used to this prison system and serve one's own term as if nothing has happened." At present, it appears, the Belarusian opposition cannot do much more than accept Shydlouski's stoical advice.

(RFE/RL's Belarus Service has contributed to this report.)
Source: RFE/RL Newline, Nov. 7, 2006 - End Note

Lukashenka: Why the Union State Does not Exist

By David Marples

In the past week, 83 journalists from 73 different Russian media outlets visited Belarus. They hailed from 48 regions of Russia and were given a tour of enterprises and collective farms in Hrodna and Mahileu oblasts. At the end of the tour they were invited to a press conference in Minsk that was hosted by Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenka, which lasted for four hours. The transcript of the statement by the president and his responses to the various questions runs to 25,000 words. But amid the boasting about Belarus's achievements, its stability and its modernization, the reader can perceive increasing bitterness toward the administration of Russian President Vladimir Putin, especially on the issue of the Russia-Belarus Union.

Lukashenka commented, as often in the past, on the tragedy of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and he informed the journalists that "We are one people" and that it is unfair that we "live in different apartments." Thus a reunion between Belarus and Russia would be a natural event, representing the bright future of the two peoples. However, he made it plain that that union is unlikely to occur in the near future, largely because of problems created by Russia. He noted that the Belarusian side had proposed a draft of the Constitutional Act. However, at the time the draft version was supposed to have been submitted to the Supreme State Council of the two presidents for approval, and then to a referendum for acceptance, the Russian government added some amendments. According to Lukashenka, the revised Constitutional Act would be weaker than the current treaty on forming the Union state. Belarus "is categorically opposed to this."

Lukashenka maintains that Putin would like an arrangement similar in terms to that of the European Union, but such a structure is unacceptable to the Belarusian side. Another option is for Belarus to become part of Russia, but the president noted correctly that the population of his country is strongly opposed to absorption. "Even Stalin didn't go as far as that," he stated. Now he (Lukashenka) is being blamed for the failure of the proposals, but he has no choice because he does not wish to be the first and last Belarusian president. The current draft would also bring back the conditions of the early 1990s -- a favorite reference of Lukashenka -- and as soon as Belarus becomes part of Russia it would be reduced to worse shape than Chechnya. The Union can only work if the partnership is an equal one, he stressed.

> **The Union can only work if the partnership is an equal one**
> **Alexander Lukashenka**

Concerning the leadership of a Union state, Lukashenka hinted that both incumbent presidents might bar themselves from office if such a state is set up. "The issue is not Putin or Lukashenka," he commented. He added frankly that he could not deny the two leaders had ambitions and that they would be afraid of losing the independence of their countries. The issue of how that statement would apply to Russia was not elaborated. Lukashenka added that there could be no immediate resolution of such questions because Russia would soon enter a very busy period, lasting for approximately three years, in which that country would endure both presidential and parliamentary elections. He commented that Putin should run for a third term if he wishes, but he appreciated that the Russian president wished to adhere to the Constitution. It is not a commitment ever made by the president of Belarus.

Frequently, Lukashenka returned to the issue that most irks him: the impending hike in the price Belarus must pay for Russian gas. He maintained that Belarusian troops comprise almost 100% of the joint force on the border with NATO, and that they would be the first to sacrifice their lives to protect Russia. Yet Belarus is expected to pay gas prices higher than those in Germany. Lukashenka declared that this is a violation of an existing agreement that Belarus should pay the same prices as those in Smolensk. If his country were made to pay the proposed doubling of the price of gas, then there would be a complete breach in relations. Belarus might charge Russia $2 billion for the transit of Russian gas to the West and then pay back $1 billion for the purchase of gas for domestic use.

Two conclusions can be made from Lukashenka's remarks. First, Belarusian-Russian relations remain in an uncomfortable phase because the Belarusian government is trying to keep all its options open: to secure cheap gas and optimal conditions without making any sacrifices such as the sale of its transit company Beltransgaz to Russia. Second, neither an agreement on a new Union state or a referendum on Belarus joining such a state will take place any time soon. Russia's terms are unacceptable and the outcome would be the removal of Lukashenka from office -- either involuntarily because of the appointment of a new joint president, or because he would lose the support of the elec-

torate. In this way, the president can maintain the fiction that he is responding to the wishes of the people on the question of the Russia-Belarus Union. At one time it seemed to be the best path for him; today it is no longer a feasible option.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor, October 2, 2006

Lukashenka Opts for Nuclear Power

David Marples

Belarus, the Soviet republic most heavily affected by fallout from the 1986 nuclear accident at Chernobyl, has decided to develop its own nuclear power industry.

On December 1, Mikhail Myasnikovich, chairman of the National Academy of Sciences, made the announcement at a meeting concerning the improvement of energy security in the country attended by President Alexander Lukashenka. In a subsequent speech, Lukashenka remarked that nuclear power is clearly the best alternative for Belarus to eradicate itself from a complex predicament in energy resources. About 85% of all its energy needs are based on imports; and since his recent meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Lukashenka believes that there will soon be a deficiency in hydrocarbon supplies in Russia that could have an adverse impact on the Belarusian economy. Though there are several possible solutions to such energy dependency (including a price rise for imported Russian gas in 2007), the decision to turn to nuclear power was accepted unanimously by meeting participants, and the president requested that the government's proposal be forwarded to the Security Council.

Anti-nuclear sentiment has a lengthy history in Belarus
(as a result of the Chernobyl catastrophe)

The original plan was drafted last May and has been widely circulated. The station is to be a VVER-1000 plant, based initially on two reactors that will either be of Russian or French design. The first reactor is anticipated to be on line by 2015, but could be in service as early as 2013, if workers adhere to the timetable suggested by the president. Each 1,000-megawatt reactor will cost a reported $1.3-$1.7 billion, a figure that likely excludes the costs of decommissioning and burial of radioactive waste. Technical supervision will be in the hands of the United Institute of Energy and Nuclear Research of the National Academy of Sciences, and preparatory work is occurring in cooperation with international organizations, headed by the IAEA.

By commissioning the two reactors, Belarus could cut its reliance on Russian energy by 24%. In turn the share of nuclear power in the energy balance of the country could increase to 20%, with natural gas falling to 50% within the next 15 years, if the project runs on schedule. By the middle of the 21st century, the proportion of nuclear energy could conceivably be 85%, which would be among the highest in the world.

A widespread debate has taken place over the past few years as to the likely whereabouts of such a station. Evidently there were several possible sites, but the actual choice is the same as projected several years ago, before a 10-year moratorium on commissioning nuclear reactors went into operation in 1998. The decision could hardly be more controversial: Krasnapol'le in Chavusy region, Mahileu oblast. The location is 40 miles southeast of the city of Mahileu and 60 miles from the Russian border. It is also this same distance from the village of Shklou, in which Lukashenka was raised. Moe significant, it is in a swathe of territory known to be contaminated with radioactive cesium in the soil at a level of more than 1 curie per square kilometer. An independent NGO, the Belarusian Charitable Fund "For the Children of Chernobyl," has focused on health problems in this area for the past 20 years, sending hundreds of children for periods of recuperation to Europe and North America. The incidence of thyroid gland cancer among young people has risen more than 25 times since the accident in the republic as a whole.

Lukashenka dismisses such concerns as a product of "radiophobia and the post-Chernobyl syndrome." However, the opposition to nuclear power in the republic is undeniable. In early November, according to a poll conducted by the Vilnius-based NISEPI, only 32.5% of those surveyed supported the idea of a domestic nuclear power industry, 47.7% were opposed, and 14.5% were undecided on the issue. The president maintains that it will be possible to use propaganda to convince Belarusians that their fears are unjustified, and he began by describing the reliance of various countries on nuclear power, led by France. He noted that 60 new nuclear reactors are currently being commissioned worldwide, which will add to the 442 already in operation. Belarus, he added, is "surrounded" by Russian and Ukrainian reactors -- for some reason he omitted the Ignalina station in Lithuania. Thus, he states, it is illogical for the population to object to his latest scheme.

Anti-nuclear sentiment has a lengthy history in Belarus, where a nuclear power and heating plant not far from today's Minsk-2 international airport was abandoned after the Chernobyl accident. Demonstrations against nuclear power led directly to the establishment of the Belarusian Popular Front, Belarus's main opposition movement between 1989 and 1993. For Lukashenka, Chernobyl-related protests are a refuge and priority of the opposition and his government has insisted that the contaminated land can be returned to cultivation. The announcement of the new station is an indicator both of the government's desperation to reduce its reliance on imports of Russian gas for its energy needs and an indicator of the dearth of real options.

Sources: (Belaruskaya delovaya gazeta, Belorusskie novosti , Charter 97, December 1; Belorusskoe telegrafnoe agenstvo, December 1, 4; RIA-Novosti, December 5; http://bbfchernobyl.iatp.by/)

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR
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Belarusians Abroad

Libertas Support Fund

Introduction

The Libertas Support Fund programme aims to help students who find it impossible or extremely difficult to study in their home country because of the political situation there. In 2006, the programme will only be open to students from Belarus, but in the future it may be opened to students from other countries too. The Libertas Support Fund provides financial help to students who want to follow a bachelor's or master's programme in the Netherlands and are unable to study at home because of the political situation there. Study can include research and/or practical training.

The Dutch Minister for Education, Culture and Science has made one million euros available. There is no fixed number of available scholarships, but the actual number is determined by the total cost of the variable components of the scholarships.

Requirements for eligibility

If you want to take part in the Libertas Support Fund programme, you must meet the following requirements.

1. You must come from a country where it is impossible or extremely difficult for you to study because of your political convictions (in 2006, only applications from Belarusian nationals will be considered).
2. You must be admitted to the Dutch programme on the basis of prior education at a higher education institution in your home country (Belarus) immediately preceding your arrival in the Netherlands.
3. You may only study or conduct research at an institution that has signed the Code of Conduct for international study in the Netherlands.
4. The Dutch programme must be on the CROHO list (CROHO is the official central register of higher education programmes in the Netherlands).
5. Your study in the Netherlands must be used primarily to earn a degree at the Dutch institution.
6. At the start of the academic year (1 September) in which you study in the Netherlands, you must be no older than 35 years of age.

Application procedure

1. First of all, you have to apply for academic admission to a study programme.
2. When you apply for admission to a study programme in the Netherlands, you should indicate that you wish to apply for a Libertas Support Fund scholarship.
3. If the Dutch institution agrees with your candidacy for a Libertas scholarship, the host institution will send you a letter confirming your admission (which can be conditional or unconditional) to the study programme. The letter must include the following information:

* the name of the study programme or department (programme name and code as registered in CROHO)

* name and position of the academic supervisor

* a statement that you are welcome to attend the study programme or department

* the amount of the tuition fees

You can submit an application to Nuffic as soon as you have received the admission letter from your host institution. Your application dossier must include the following documents:

1. A printed Libertas Support Fund application form, completed in full and signed.
2. A letter from the host institution in the Netherlands granting admission (conditional or unconditional).
3. Your curriculum vitae.
4. Recent copies of relevant academic records, diplomas, certificates or transcripts from the higher education programme in your home country.
5. A statement (use one side of an A4 sheet) in which you describe in your own words:
   - your studies at a higher education institution in your own country
   - how it was made practically impossible or extremely difficult for you to follow the programme or continue your studies because of your political convictions.
6. Details of your intended programme of study in the Netherlands.
7. A copy of your passport.

Once you have compiled your application dossier:

1. send the application form by e-mail to: libertas@nuffic.nl. You must include the name of the Libertas programme and your family name in the subject of your e-mail;
2. send the complete dossier, including a print-out of the application form by post to the address below.

Libertas Support Fund
Nuffic
PO Box 29777
2502 LT THE HAGUE
The Netherlands

Do not include original documents in your dossier, but make single-sided copies of relevant documents on plain A4-sized paper. All documents must be in either English or Dutch. Documents in any other language must be accompanied by an official translation.

Closing date

Applications can be submitted at any time during the 2006-2007 academic year. Do not submit more than one application.

Scholarship outline

Scholarships are awarded for a maximum of 12 months (between 1 September 2006 and 31 August 2007).They include the following components:

- a monthly allowance of 900 EUROs (this includes a standard contribution towards healthcare insurance)
- statutory tuition fees
- visa fees (standard contribution)
- a one-off payment towards international travel costs (standard contribution based on country of origin); the payment for Belarus is: 600 EUROs.

Selection procedure

Once we have received your complete application, we will send you confirmation of receipt by e-mail. The applications will be assessed by Nuffic. Nuffic then makes its recommendations to the Minister. The final decision will be taken by the Minister within four weeks of receiving your complete and correctly submitted dossier.

You can expect to receive either an official scholarship award letter or a rejection letter in about six weeks. If you are selected, your host institution will make arrangements for your accommodation, healthcare insurance and certain immigration procedures (MVV application). Nuffic does not pay the scholarship directly to students. You will receive your scholarship from your host institution. We will inform your host institution of the outcome of the selection process. If you are successfully selected, please contact your host institution as soon as possible to complete all the necessary admission and enrolment formalities.

Subsequent applications

You can apply for a scholarship from the Libertas Support Fund once every academic year (for a maximum of 12 months). You will have to submit a new application for every new academic year in which you continue your studies.

The maximum duration of the scholarship depends on the type of degree you are studying for.

Bachelor's degree programme:

• if you are following an academic programme (WO), you can apply for the scholarship a maximum of four times

• if you are following a professional programme (HBO), you can apply a maximum of five times

Master's degree programme:

• if you are following an academic programme (WO), you can apply for the scholarship a maximum of two times; however, if the master's programme is worth 120 study credits, you will be allowed to apply a maximum of three times

• if you are following a professional master?s programme (HBO), you can apply a maximum of two times

You can apply for a scholarship for a bachelor's programme, and again at a later time for a master's programme.

The detailed terms and conditions for subsequent applications will be published on this website in due course.

Questions

Frequently Asked Questions

If you have any other questions, please send them by e-mail to: libertas@nuffic.nl.

The Transformation Cooperation Unit of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The objective of this institution is to assist the Belarusian society in the process of transition to the democratic way of life: by providing education for Belarusian university students, prepa ring specialists in various fields, making them acquainted with Czech experience in a similar transition, and also with functioning of public infrastructure facilities in today's Czech Republic. The Transformation Cooperation unit was established in 2005.

According to the Ministry's official data, in 2006 the unit provided support for 26 Belarus-related projects, implemented by various Czech civic organizations and universities.

Most significant projects are listed below:

1. One or several semesters of study programs for current and graduate students of Belarusian universities. The programs were *implemented by*:

• The J.E. Purkyne university in Usti nad Labem - departments of natural history and humanities.

• Masaryk university in Brno - department of social studies.

• Palacky's university in Olomouc - department of philosophy, faculty of politology and European studies.

• Western Bohemian university in Plzen - department of philosophy.

• Charles university in Prague - department of humanities.

• National Economy Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

• University of Public Administration and International Relations , in Prague.

2. Education of Belarusian law students and young lawyers, involved in the democratic movement ; assistance to persons politically persecuted in Belarus. *Implemented by*: the society People-in-Need.

3. European Choice for Belarus - Pavel Tigrid internship. *Implemented by:* Association for International Affairs.

4. Education of Belarusian journalists, strengthening the freedom of expression in Belarus. *Implemented by*: Transitions Online, Prague.

5. Development of self-government democracy in Belarus. *Implemented by*: Czech League of Towns and Communities.

6. House of Human Rights in Vilnius, Lithuania(in cooperation with Norway, Lithuania, Swedish Helsinki Committee, U.S. National Endowment for Democracy). *Implemented by:* International Association Civil Belarus*.

7. Support for the independent European Radio for Belarus (in cooperation with the U.S., Canada, European Union). *Implemented by:* International Association Civil Belarus*.

* **Editor's Note**: The International Association Civil Belarus was established in 2004. Its founding members were: Vaclav Havel - former president of the Czech Republic, Tomas Pojar - former director of the society People-in-Need, senators Jan Ruml and Karel Schwarzenberg, Anna Sabatova - deputy Public Protector of Human Rights.

QUOTES of QUARTER

"This will be a very difficult year, it will be catastrophically hard."

"I am calling upon all (of you) — Sheiman, Sidorski, Prakapovich, Lomats (his key ministers) to work in the direction of Venezuela, Iran, Azerbaijan."

"This we must do, if we want to save the country for our children, (save our) sovereignty and independence, so they don't put us up against the wall every day, every month, every year, so they don't crucify us and don't yell: "pay up for gas and oil"!"

ALEXANDER LUKASHENKA's statements at his Cabinet meeting on November 23.

Public Panel Discussion in Olomouc (Czech Republic)

A public panel discussion, entitled "Belarus - Where is it Heading?" was held at the Palacky's University in Olomouc on November 30, 2006. It was organized by the faculty of politology and European studies in the university's department of philosophy, in cooperation with the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The main part of the event featured the following participants, who delivered their contributions in Czech:

1. Petr Hlavacek, a politologue with Masaryk's university, on topic: Perspectives of the Lukashenka regime and the opposition in the context of 2006 presidential elections.
2. Illa Hlybouski, of the Belcentrum section of the People-in-Need foundation, on topic: Outline of the situation in Belarus from the foundation's point of view, and the possible ways of cooperating with the Belarusian opposition.
3. George Stankevich, editor of the *Belarusian Review*, on topic: Image of Belarus in the foreign press; what the western reader learns, and what he also should learn.
4. Katerina Kedron, a graduate student with the Institute of Slavistics at Masaryk's university, on topic: Contemporary linguistic situation in Belarus, and the government's education policy in universities (theory and practice).
5. Helena Stohanzlova, from the Transformation Cooperation unit of the Czech Foreign Ministry, on topic: Summary of the Czech transformation cooperation, pertaining to Belarus.

Finally, two Belarusian students, currently on a study program, offered by the Palacky's university, delivered their contributions (in English) on topics of : Today's political and economic situation in Belarus.

Paris Says – Belarus!

A festival "We say – Belarus?" was held in Paris for a week. It was timed to the traditional Day of Belarusian Solidarity held on the 16th day of every month. The program of the festival contains more than a dozen of culture and public events, held on various stages of the French capital.

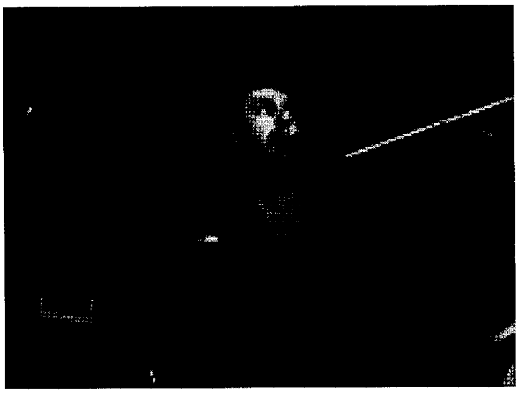


The Days of Solidarity with Belarus, held monthly by public, political and cultural organizations in Europe and North America, recently have exceeded the level of local political actions and reached the significance of large public and cultural events. More and more politicians, public and culture personalities are taking part in them.

The festival "We say – Belarus?" tried to acquaint residents of Paris not only with representatives of Belarusian counter-culture, but to encourage a discussion about possible relations between Belarus and France; about what representatives of the French society could do for returning democracy to Belarus; and how interesting the Belarusian culture is for France.

The program of the festival was hard-driving and varied; a photo exhibition, a play, concerts, presentations of films, discussions. All events enjoyed great interest of Parisians and took place before a full audience.

Concerts of Zmitser Vajtsyushkevich and his "WZ-Orkiestra" and of Kasia Kamotskaya attracted capacity audiences and received a great ovation. Their performance had been preceded by works of Belarusian filmmaker Yury Khaschavatski. French audience in the "House of Europe and East" watched the film "An Ordinary President" and working materials of the filmmaker's new film "Kalinouski Square". After the screening viewers were asking questions to the author of the film for two hours.



Zmitser Vajtsyushkevich performing

For the whole period of the festival in Paris two photo exhibitions were working. They were acquainting the French with life and people of Belarus. One of them was an exhibition of a photo artist Jeff Bonifacino, showed the portraits of the leading personalities of informal art in Belarus.

The climax of the festival was the "Free Theatre's" play "Jeans Generation" held in Theatre-Studio, which is the residence of the "Free Theatre" in Western Europe. The first tour of the theatre in Paris is scheduled to be held in this theatre. About 20 plays of "Free Theatre" are to be demonstrated there.

Paris project was realized greatly thanks to enthusiasm of the director of the project, Anna Didier, who hadn't been concealing that the action had been based to a large extent on a work of volunteers. "The advantage of the Belarusian project is its simplicity: minimum of funds and maximum of creativity. Besides, everything worked well because of the spirit of solidarity which reigned among the organizers, participants of the project and Parisian public. We knew that we would be able to evoke a response from Parisians, but we couldn't expect such a passionate attention and support".

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, Nov. 20, 2006

MEDIA WATCH

PRESS REVIEW

Belarus police detain opposition leader (*Associated Press*, by Yuras Karmanau, December 12, 2006) — Police briefly detained Belarusian opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich on Monday for the third time in two weeks, accusing him of drug trafficking, his spokesman said.

Milinkevich has been traveling around the country before local council elections scheduled for next month.

He was detained earlier because he allegedly resembled someone who had been in a car that had fatally run over a pedestrian. After traveling to Latvia to meet with President Bush at a NATO summit last month, he was stopped by authorities at the Minsk airport for allegedly carrying a forged passport.

Milinkevich: Belarus will be democratic within two years (*The Associated Press*, December 11, 2006) — Belarusian opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich said Monday he was sure the totalitarian ex-Soviet republic would become democratic in two years, despite a campaign of intimidation by President Alexander Lukashenka.

"There is a problem in today's Belarus: the authorities are doing everything they can to intimidate people, not only imprisoning them, but firing them from jobs, from school ... But I don't think fear prevails, young people demonstrating are not afraid of the KGB anymore," Milinkevich told European Union lawmakers a day before he was to receive the Sakharov Prize, the EU's top human rights award names after one of the best known former Soviet dissidents.

"I'm sure democracy will come to my country within two years," Milinkevich told the European Parliament in Belarusian.

UN expert calls for health access for jailed opposition leader on hunger strike (*Belorusskie Novosti*, December 11, 2006) — An independent United Nations human rights expert today called on the Government of Belarus to assure access to proper health care for the jailed leader of the Belarusian Socialist Democratic party Narodnaya Hramada, Aleksandr Kazulin, who has been on hunger strike for the past 50 days.

The Special Rapporteur on human rights in Belarus, Adrian Severin, urged the Government to grant family members, legal representatives and independent monitors free access to former presidential candidate Kazulin, who was sentenced to five-and-a-half years imprisonment in July.

"On 20 October, Mr. Kazulin started a hunger strike to protest against the lawlessness in Belarus and to draw the attention of the [UN] Security Council to the situation in Belarus," Mr. Severin said in a statement, voicing "his deepest concern."

In a letter to his family Mr. Kazulin indicated that a doctor's exam last month confirmed that he had lost 36 kilos, the statement noted.

Belarus official threatens more HIV-migrants, terrorists, into EU (*dpa German Press Agency*, December 4, 2006) — Belarusian senator Nikolai Charhinets on Monday threatened the European Union with a wave of illegal migrants - some of them HIV-positive and others terrorists - if the EU fails to show "appreciation." "Belarus on its borders and along roads to the EU arrests dozens and even hundreds of (migrants) infected with HIV, or persons suspected of terrorism or participating in organized crime," Charhinets said at a Minsk press conference.

"European voters will not say 'thank you' to their elected officials, if Belarus weakens the control over its borders."

Charhinets made the comments in response to a question on Belarus' position towards recent EU criticism of Belarus' authoritarian regime, and especially recent crack-downs on opposition leaders.

Although Belarusian relations with the EU are practically non-existent, an increasingly cash-strapped Belarus has called on the EU for financial assistance, in order to help prevent illegal migrants from traveling from Belarus to its EU neighbors: Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia.

Independent newspaper threatened with closure in Belarus (*Associated Press*, November 27, 2006) — Belarusian authorities have warned a leading independent newspaper that it could face closure – a move its editor on Monday described as part of government efforts to muzzle critical voices.

Deputy Information Minister Lilia Ananich said the weekly *Nasha Niva*'s had been handed an official warning over its failure to indicate its address in the issues published this month as required by the Belarusian law. "The editors have rudely violated the law," she said.

The newspaper, which marked its 100th anniversary this month, had to change its offices four times this year after authorities barred it from the capital, Minsk. The state postal agency has refused to distribute the weekly, and authorities also have barred it from subscription.

"The Belarusian authorities don't stop attempts to destroy the last remaining independent newspapers in the country," *Nasha Niva*'s editor Andrey Dynko said.

Reporters Without Borders, a Paris-based media rights watchdog, criticized the Belarusian authorities' moves against Nasha Niva, saying the newspaper's rental contracts had been canceled under official pressure.

A Government in Exile, a Country in a Mess (*Economist*, Nov 16th 2006, excerpts from an article) — The Belarusian National Rada [Rada of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile], or council, seems preposterously peripheral. Via a tenuous chain of succession and inheritance it represents a Belarusian state that was founded in 1918 and existed for barely a year. It has had no surviving counterparts since similar émigré outfits, such as the Ukrainian and Polish governments-in-exile, packed up in triumph at the end of the cold war.

The Rada's main achievement is to have survived at all through the decades during which Belarus was part of the Soviet Union; and it was wise enough to keep its distance from the post-Soviet regime in Minsk after 1991. Its ambition still is to wind itself up, but only when Belarus has a democratically elected and truly independent government.

That is a brave hope. Russia casts a long, dark shadow. Belarus relies heavily on Russia for trade and investment, for energy, and for security. A "union state" with a common currency, passport and constitution has been a declared aim of the two countries, at least until recently.

Russia has helped Mr Lukashenka in the past with cheap gas, flattery, and strong diplomatic protection against Western criti-

cism. In return, Mr Lukashenka's Belarus has sold Russian arms to dodgy customers, and has provided almost the sole living example of that rare breed, a happy and grateful Russian ally.

But now the deal is fraying. Plans for the two-country "union state" are on hold, for which each side blames the other. Russia wants to raise fourfold the price of the gas it sells to Belarus; it also wants to claw back the profits Belarus makes by refining cheap Russian crude oil and selling it on. That squeeze is partly a Russian tactic aimed at grabbing control of Belarus's energy industries. But it is also a slap at the irascible Mr Lukashenka, for being unwisely critical of his counterpart in the Kremlin, Vladimir Putin.

If Russia and Belarus do truly fall out, the future will be full of interesting possibilities. The Kremlin could topple Mr Lukashenka and seek the incorporation of Belarus into Russia. That would give the Belarusian National Rada a new if unwanted lease of life as the sole representative of an independent Belarus.

Belarus Christians Fast for Freedom(*CBN News*, by Gailon Totheroh, October 23, 2006) — In response what parishioners see as the government's restrictions on their religious freedom, a hunger strike began Oct. 5 at New Life Church on the outskirts of Minsk. Believers from many other congregations have joined the protest.

The church has faced harassment from uniformed and plainclothes police on their property after staging peaceful protests of exorbitant fines levied by the city of Minsk. The city is planning on taking the property and paying the church $17,000 - a fraction of its value in what most observers are calling theft.

Pastor Slava Hancharenka appealed to all Christians, saying "Brothers, we ask you, to pray for us, stand together with us now in this tense and difficult time. Also you can write letters of support for us to the administration of President Lukashenka. This could be done from individuals or churches."

Whatever the outcome of the hunger strike, Christians in Belarus say that their efforts will produce more religious liberty and more freedom for all nations' citizens.

Europe Doesn't Know How to Fight Dictators (*Lidove Noviny* - Prague, October 11, 2006. Excerpts from an interview with Alexander Milinkevich)

Lidove Noviny (LN): What's the situation in Belarus more than half a year after the presidential elections?

What's important is that people began to believe that it's possible to change some things. They are much more active and have lost their fear. They grasped that those who want change represent a majority.

On the other hand, the government lost its self-confidence and is therefore more aggressive. We have never before experienced the degree of repressions conducted now, after the elections.

The conditions of our work are naturally more difficult, since most of the non-governmental organizations are not registered anymore , and their activities are punishable by imprisonment . In addition, many of our activists have lost their jobs. These are government's main weapons.

LN: How can Lukashenka's regime be changed? How can one fight it?

There exists only one method of fighting the dictatorship: organizing street demonstrations. A dictatorship will never change by elections. It will never disclose the actual election results; it don't even count the votes. The authorities simply fill out the prepared report forms.

Our task is to activate people for staging on a certain day a massive demonstration on a city square. The recent history records such moments when a large number of people forced even police to join them. However, we still must work hard to achieve this situation — by constantly informing people, and helping them to overcome fear.

LN: How could the Czech Republic best help the Belarusian opposition?

Czechs can be our valuable ambassadors to the united Europe; actually, they are already. We have much in common, since Czechs understand better what is happening in Belarus.

LN: And how can the European Union support you?

The Union is helping - with scholarships for students, with electronic media for broadcasting to Belarus, and supporting us morally. However, it doesn't know how to support democratic organizations in Belarus. **Europeans seem to have already forgotten how to fight dictatorships.** They work better with democracies.

Belarus' deadly arms trade (*International Herald Tribune*, by Mark Douglas, October 9, 2006) — Over the last six years, Belarus has intensified its illegal arms shipment activities to the point of becoming the leading supplier of lethal military equipment to Islamic state sponsors of terrorism, including the Mi-24 gunships that have helped claim hundreds of thousands of lives in Darfur, Sudan.

During 2001 alone, according to Jane's Defense International, Belarus secretly delivered weapons worth more than $500 million, including Katyusha rockets, 120mm mortars, antitank rockets and mines, to Palestinian militants and countries including Syria and Iran.

Belarusian president, Aleksandr Lukashenka, has not even attempted to conceal his assistance to Syria in modernizing its military capability - and that of Hezbollah. "No matter how severely we are admonished for it," he said, "we will continue to help Syria militarily because they have promised to help us in the same way."

BOOK REVIEW

History of Belarus - in Czech

ISBN 80-7106-828-4

This 300-page book is published in the *East Translates East* project framework of the Next Page Foundation.

It is published with the support of:
European Cultural Foundation, and
East European Book Projects, Amsterdam.

The contents is based on the Belarusian-language original works by Hienadz Sahanovich: *Narys historyi Bielarusi ad starazytnasci da kanca XVIII st.*, published in Minsk in 2001, and Zachar Sybieka: *Narys historyi Bielarusi 1795-2002*, published in Minsk in 2002.

Translated by Adam Havlin.

The book may be ordered on-line from:
http://www.neoluxor.cz

BOOK REVIEW *(continued from p. 31)*

Belarus after the "election" —
What Future for the Lukashenka regime?

ISBN 83-89406-74-8 (Stefan Batory Foundation)
ISBN 80-903468-7-1 (Association for International Affairs)

This 40-page booklet has been published in September 2006 by the Stefan Batory Foundation (Warsaw), and the Association for International Affairs (Prague).

It has been prepared by Messrs. Grzegorz Gromadzki, Wojciech Kononczuk, and Lubos Vesely.

LETTERS

Dear Mr. Arciuch:

Prime Minister Harper and I are very concerned by the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus, as well as by the blatant abuses of democracy in that country. You will no doubt have seen my statement of July 14, 2006, in which I condemned the sentencing of Mr. Kozulin for exercising his right to protest. I also announced that Canada has initiated steps to restrict trade with Belarus, by adding Belarus to the Area Control List.

Allow me to reassure you that this Government continues to attach great importance to democratization and human rights in Belarus. I would like to note that the discussion at the G8 Summit was overtaken by events of the day in the Middle East. Nevertheless, democracy in Eastern Europe was raised by the Prime Minister, and will continue to be a focus for him. I raised he question of Belarus at the G8 Foreign Ministers meeting in Moscow, and the discussion that followed was a frank and mature debate amongst colleagues who share fundamental values.

As pertains to your concerns for the possible union of Belarus with Russia, our primary goal for Belarus is to see it evolve into a fully-fledged democracy, part of the community of European democracies that we partner with as like-minded friends and allies. Like many of our European partners, Canada views the integrity of states as fundamental to security and cooperation in international relations, and we believe that every state has the right to juridical equality, to territorial integrity and to freedom and political independence.

Thank you for your continued interest in these matters.

Sincerely,

Peter G. MacKay
Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Ministre des Affaires étrangéres
Ottawa, Canada K1A 0G2

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